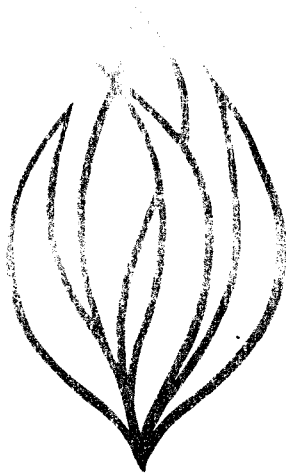


A Burning Fire



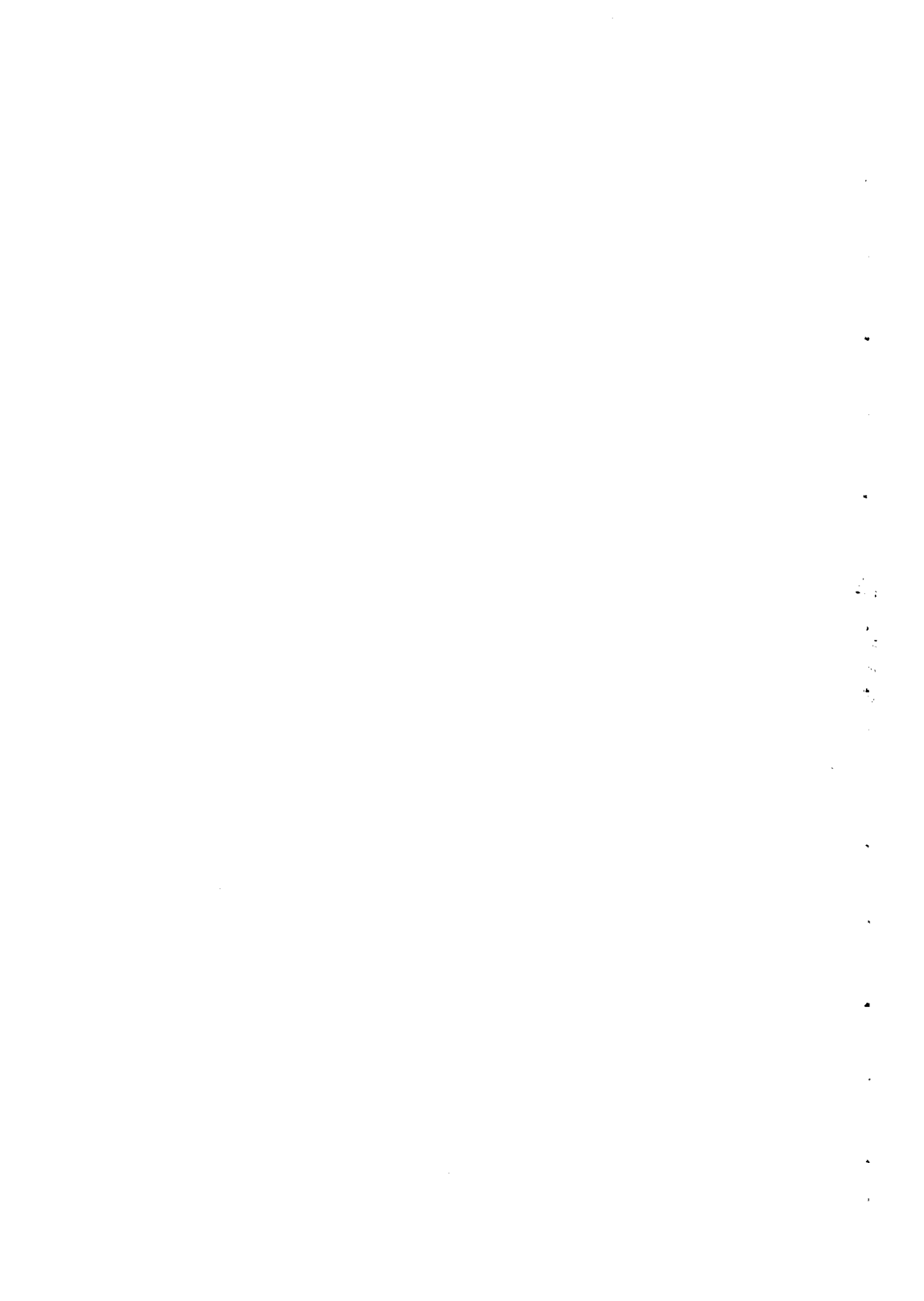
“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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James W. Boyd



The Healing Of Naaman

It is not easy to tell just what might motivate one to obey the gospel. Some teaching, some illustration, some Biblical account comes at a crucial moment in a person's life and leads him to Christ. I baptized a man after preaching this lesson and as we were coming out of the water of baptism he told me that the story of Naaman and his healing did more to help him understand the relationship between salvation and obedience than any one lesson he had heard. He advised, "You ought to preach that lesson more often." Possibly, what influenced him could influence another. This Old Testament account certainly does shed the light of truth on some basic and fundamental matters in being saved.

Please turn in your Bible to Second Kings 5:1-14, and read this passage which is the text for this study.

Naaman, a Gentile, was a captian of the Syrian army. He was an important man in Syria, considered great in the eyes of his king and the nation, "*but he was a leper.*" There was "*a little maid,*" an Israelite who had been taken captive by the Syrians who waited on Naaman's wife. This unnamed person told Naaman's wife that there was a prophet of God in Samaria that could heal her master. The healing of Naaman was eventually accomplished, but not near so easily as it could have been if Naaman had not made things more complicated and committed several blunders. His mistakes are much the same kind of mistakes people make today as they seek their spiritual healing from sin. Remember that Paul said "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...*" (Romans 15:4).

Mistake Number One

Naaman's first mistake was that he went to the wrong person. Naaman was told to go to the prophet of God in Samaria, but he went to the king of Israel. This upset the king of Israel, who cried, "*Am I God...*" In other words, he was saying, "What can I do about leprosy?" There was nothing the king could do. He had no such power to heal. In fact, Israel's king considered the entire episode as an excuse for Syria to make an attack against Israel.

Elisha, God's prophet, heard how the king was upset, and he sent word for Naaman to come to him. We are made to wonder why Naaman did not seek out the prophet in the first place. Possibly it was his pride. After all, Naaman was considered a great man. Should he go and search for a lowly prophet? He was one of position and fame. Certainly, pride keeps many people from coming to the right source for their salvation. They refuse to humble themselves before the lowly Nazarene. They want forgiveness but without repentance, confession, without giving up their sins. They wish to follow doctrines, creeds, traditions, opinions of man's making rather than submit to the will of the Lord. Their attitude is one of "what I want, rather than what God wants."

Let us learn early, that there is only one to whom we can go for salvation. *"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6). Jesus was humble and lowly from His birth through His death. We must bow our will unto Him or we reject salvation. As Peter declared, *"Thou hast the words of eternal life."* Before there can be spiritual victory there must be surrender to Christ, without reservation. Rebellion and refusal to accept His instruction, failure to follow His directions, means condemnation. Such it was with Naaman, and so it is with us.

Mistake Number Two

Naaman left the king's palace and went to the door of the humble home of Elisha, God's prophet. But there he made his second blunder. Scripture says he *"stood at the door"* expecting to be healed right there. Just as the king was the wrong person, the door of Elisha's house was the wrong place.

Elisha sent his servant to Naaman with instructions. He was to go and dip in the Jordan River seven times and he would be healed. He had to go to the right place which was the Jordan River. This upset Naaman greatly. It was a strange direction, but who was he to decide what ought to be done?

Naaman complained, *"Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?"* Naaman was making the mistake in thinking that the power of healing was the water itself. But the quality of the water was not what made the difference. The river

was that into which he had to dip, but the power of healing was in God, not the river. Naaman failed to realize that the power of healing would be applied to him when he obeyed what he was commanded to do. It may well have been true that the rivers of Syria were superior to Jordan, but that is not where God said for Naaman to go.

Let me tell you where we must go to receive healing from sin. As the song states, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross." Redemption for man is through the blood of Christ. "*In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*" (Colossians 1:14). "*Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*" (Romans 5:9). Christ died on the cross and His blood is the power that cleanses. Jesus bore our sins on the cross. We must behold Christ on the cross. We must come to that cross, His death, reach His blood, or we cannot be saved. We must make our appeal for salvation through the provision made at Calvary. This is God's way of redeeming man.

Though some may be offended at the cross, reject the idea of the Savior having to die, even be repulsed at the use of blood, nonetheless the penalty for my sins and yours was paid there, in His death. Later we shall see just how we come to His blood and enter into His death.

Mistake Number Three

The third blunder of Naaman was that he expected to pay the wrong price. He had taken many riches with him from Syria and he offered money, gifts, clothes, riches, etc. Some people seem to think that they can buy anything if they have enough money. But some things cannot be purchased with money. Simon, the former sorcerer, in Acts, chapter eight, thought he could buy the apostolic power with money. Naaman did not yet realize that the only price involved was humble obedience to the command of God. Nothing less would suffice, and nothing more could purchase the gift he needed. There is a danger that some may think they can buy their way into heaven by generous and liberal giving. Giving is a sacred and precious privilege and duty, but first we must give ourselves. People cannot by-pass God's way and be complete. We might remember how Saul and Israel saved animals of the Amalekites for sacrifices, but God was not pleased with sacrifices in the face of disobedience. All Naaman had to do was to dip seven times in the River Jordan. That is all.

It was so simple that he balked. He was like many today. He had not yet learned what God required. He had to obey if he was going to be blessed.

Mistake Number Four

Naaman also wanted to follow a different plan than what the Lord said. Notice his comment upon hearing the Lord's requirements. He said, "*I thought...*" Like so many today, Naaman already had it worked out in his own mind how he ought be healed. He had figured out how God ought to do it. But the plan for healing was not left to Naaman to present. It was his task to follow God's plan. The only thinking he needed to do is to think what God wanted and then do it. Too many now have it figured out how they are going to be saved and what they have figured is not what God has said at all. True enough, we are to work out our own salvation (Philippians 1:12), but we are not told to work out our own plan of salvation. That belongs to God.

Mistake Number Five

When Naaman learned his plan was not the way, he grew angry. "*But Naaman was wroth, and went away...*" Today when some learn that God's plan of salvation is not what they "thought" they get angry also, even at those who have taught them the truth. Some have thought they shall be saved by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, by faith only, praying through, just ask God to come into their hearts, grace alone, etc. Sadly, so many turn away defiantly and return to their spiritual doom when the truth is presented to them and it is not what "they thought."

Naaman would have gone back to Syria a leper as he had come, but one of Naaman's servants, another unnamed hero of this account, persuaded him to lay aside his pride, his preconceived notions, and simply do as God's prophet instructed. "*If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?*" So Naaman turned back again, humbled his own will, sacrificed his pride, went to Jordan, dipped seven times, and came out clean with flesh as that of a child.

God Gets The Credit

Let us consider to whom the credit for this healing was given. None would give credit to the waters of the Jordan. Naaman did not. We all know that the power of healing resided with God. Naaman returned to the prophet, Elisha, and standing before him, praised Jehovah saying, "*Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.*"

We all know that Naaman did not earn nor merit his healing. We know it was a gift from God. But we also know that the gift was not given until Naaman met the prescribed conditions of dipping in Jordan. He had to obey.

We noted earlier that we, too, must humble ourselves, come to the right place, the cross, and enter the Lord's death to be saved. How does one enter the death of Christ? "*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.*" (Romans 6:3,4). It is in baptism that we reach the saving blood of Christ. But someone cried, "That is water salvation." It is no more and no less "water salvation" than was the healing of Naaman "water healing." The power of salvation is not in the water, but in the Lord. But the power is not applied to our sin stained souls until we are obedient in baptism and the power to heal Naaman was not applied until he obeyed by dipping in the Jordan.

Even when we are baptized we have not earned nor merited salvation. Baptism is not a work of merit but a work of obedience, as was Naaman's dipping. God gave Naaman his health and God gives us our spiritual health. Just as there was no way for Naaman to be healed except God's way, so there is no way for us to be saved except God's way. Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). While denouncing God's plan as "water salvation," let us recall that Peter said, "*...even baptism doth also now save us...*" (First Peter 3:21).

Will we let this record open our hearts to God's way to save us? Come to the right person, the right place, with the right price, following the right plan and receiving the right power.

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Religious Indecision

“And Elijah came unto all the people and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.” (First Kings 18:21).

“Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth, and put away the gods which your father served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the floods, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14,15).

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life; that both thou and thy seed may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

In each of these passages, Elijah, Joshua, and Moses were urging the people of Israel to make a religious decision and leave the state of indecision. Christ also makes demands of mankind to make a decision. In fact, the very nature of Christ and the faith of which He is the founder requires and makes necessary the making of a decision. *“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.”* (Matthew 6:24). *“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”* (Matthew 12:30).

The Reason To Decide

Paul wrote in Second Corinthians 5:11, *“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...”* Why persuade men? Because there is the necessity to make a decision regarding Christ in view of God’s wrath against evil. It is necessary to make the right decision based on evidence supplied in God’s Word. The very question that Jesus once asked, *“Who do men say that I am?”* makes a decision inescapable. *“What think ye of Christ?”* is a question we all must eventually answer.

Most people like to think of themselves as reasonable,

rational, intelligent people. God has given man the ability to think, reason, weigh evidence and make decisions. We are free moral beings with the power of choice. Some may think they can dwell in the realm of indecision regarding Christ, but by attempting to be neutral they have made a decision not to be for Him, which Jesus says is to be against Him. There is no realm where we make no decision when we consider the necessity of deciding for Christ. But some would like to leave things hanging without making a commitment one way or the other. In this sense they are in the state of indecision. We would persuade people that any attempt to remain undecided is irrational and unreasonable, out of character for anyone who would claim to be able to consider evidence and decide thereon. Let us consider some reasons why attempts at indecision are unreasonable.

God Before Man

We realize the creature is not greater than the Creator. The created has a duty to the Creator. We are the creature, having been created by God, the Creator. Is it not reasonable, therefore, for the creature to give respect to the One who has created him? We are in God's image, that is, He is Spirit and we are spirit. We have no right to ignore Him, but are obligated to honor and worship Him. It is "*in him we live, move and have our being.*" The servant is not greater than his lord. Service to God is reasonable service (Romans 12:1). It is reasonable to decide for Christ because until we come to Christ we cannot give honor to God, the Creator. "*That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him.*" (John 5:23). "*Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father, but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*" (First John 2:23). Staying from Christ is to stay from God which is not a reasonable position seeing who God is and who we are, His created.

The Future Awaits

Is it not reasonable to prepare for the inevitable and inescapable? We prepare for what may be in our future. How much more ought we prepare for what will certainly be in our future? Life is uncertain, but death is sure (James 4:14). After

death there will be the resurrection, judgment, and eternity. *“And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.”* (Hebrews 9:27). *“Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.”* (John 5:28,29). *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”* (Second Corinthians 5:10). *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”* (John 12:48). *“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”* (Acts 17:31). *“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”* (Matthew 25:41,46). These things are before us all. They are inevitable and inescapable. Is it not reasonable to make preparation for them? But so long as one remains apart from Christ, he has not made the proper preparation. *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.”* (John 14:6).

The Soul Endangered

To attempt a state of religious indecision is unreasonable because of the danger involved to the soul. When one is out of Christ, he is lost in sin. If one dies out of Christ he is lost eternally. There is no second chance. Reasonable people do not subject that which is valuable to unnecessary danger. People do not play with high voltage wires, poison, dynamite, etc. We do not act carelessly with life, but even when risks are necessary, we are cautious. But the soul is worth more than all the world (Matthew 16:26). Even though God is longsuffering and not willing that any should perish (Second Peter 3:9), there is coming an end of our opportunity to be saved. We need to realize that each refusal of Christ makes it easier to refuse Him again and again. We can become so hardened that even the precious gospel of love will make no imprint upon us. Is it not

reasonable to take special precaution with the immortal spirit? Can we not see how unreasonable it is to remain apart from Christ?

Religious indecision is unreasonable because too much is involved for one to stay away from the Savior. There is more involved than what many every consider. They may think they are dealing with only this life, but they are also concerned with the life after this. They may think they are concerned with only events in time, but they are concerned with eternity. What one does in this life determines where one will be in the next. Man is not all that is involved, but also Deity. Just the person in indecision is not all that is involved, but also his or her loved ones, neighbors, children. If you are lost, you will not go to hell without influencing others to go also. If you are saved, you will not go to heaven without influencing others to go. When one remains out of Christ his influence is against his own salvation and that of those around him. Are you satisfied with the direction of your influence? Therefore, what you think of Jesus and how you react to His commands are very significant and far-reaching. It is unreasonable for a person to have a duty in life to others, to God, to himself, and then ignore that duty. Yet, only in Christ can we fulfill our purpose in life and discharge our duty. The reasonable course is to come to Christ.

Choose Christ

I would plead with every person, young and old, that is accountable before God, and persuade from the Scriptures as well as from a rational, reasonable, sensible, logical, intelligent point of view, to decide for Christ and then become a Christian. On the basis of one's own sense of responsibility to others and the reasonableness to respond to such a manifestation of love such as God has shown toward man, come to Christ. God love you. Christ died for you. Provision for your salvation has been made. Salvation is offered to you. Blessings are yours for the taking. What more can you expect to have manifested before you that God loves you?

A knowledge of the way of salvation is essential. But having knowledge will not save standing alone. The recognition of the need of salvation, and compliance with the conditions of salvation are before you. You must believe and obey in repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Him.

If I passed around a sheet of paper and handed each a

pencil, asking for the names of those who want to go to heaven, and would then read aloud the names written on the paper, would your name be written there? More than likely each one who reads this would include his name. The Scripture says, *“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”* (Revelation 21:27). *God has a book upon which are written the names of the redeemed. As the song asks, “Is your name written there?”* Only those whose garments are made white in the blood of the Lamb, which is Christ, have their names in the book of Life. What of your name, friend?

Once Alexander the Great was asked how it was he was able to conquer the known world. He responded, *“By not delaying.”* Today is the day of salvation. Today can be the day of your salvation, if you will believe and obey the gospel. To attempt to remain in indecision means you have decided to reject Christ. There is no way for you to be mistaken about the destiny of those who persist in their rejection of the Son of God.

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(continued from page 24)

the conditions He prescribed, He added me to the company of the saved, which is the church. Man need not concern himself about joining anything. He must obey the gospel, and God takes care of church membership, because God takes care of the saving. When one is saved, he is a member of the church, because that is what the church is, the saved through Christ. Those who have obeyed the gospel are members of the church. Nothing in Scripture teaches you to do one thing to be saved and then something different to “join” some church. That is human false doctrine.

What church to join? Join none, obey God, be added to His church. Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism is the way. Have you obeyed?

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***An admission of error is a sign of strength
rather than a weakness.***

The Will And Adoption

In this lesson we will examine the subject of adoption into the family of God under the figure of a will or testament. *“And for this cause he is the mediator of the testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.”* (Hebrews 9:15-17). *“Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”* (Hebrews 10:9,10).

What do the words “will, testament, covenant” mean? When we use the words, “Old Testament” what comes to mind? We think of the 39 books that include the writings of Moses and the prophets. This is correct, but not an exhaustive meaning. Again, what does “New Testament” mean? While it means the 27 books of the writings beginning with Matthew through Revelation, is that the whole meaning? When we say one has prepared his last will and testament, what comes to mind? It is an instrument of writing containing the desires of that man concerning the distribution and division of his estate among his heirs after his death. With this definition, we have the true meaning of the words. There must always be kept in mind the death of the testator and the will he makes before death. Wills are not executed until after the death of its maker.

Second Over First

A man may make more than one will, but the second always replaces and takes precedence over the first. Only the last will is to be executed after his death, and any inheritance is determined according to that last will and testament. Two wills do not have force at the same time.

God has dealt with fallen man in a similar fashion, that is, by a will. The book of Hebrews mentions more than one will of God. Over the period of time, God has established more than one order of worship for men. But never has there been more than

one in force at a time for any given people. One ceased to be in force after the coming of the second.

The first will of God was for the patriarchs from Adam to Moses. The heads of the families served as the spiritual leaders for God. Next, for the Israelite nation, God gave a will through Moses, called the law of Moses. It was nationalistic in nature, taking the place of the patriarchal will for Israel. It continued until it was replaced by the will of God through Christ. The testament through Christ is universal in nature, extending to all men, and it replaced all that had preceded it. This is the will of God under which people living today receive inheritance from the heavenly Father. To be blessed we must comply with the terms of this new covenant. No blessings from God can be received under a will that has already been set aside and taken away.

The failure by some to understand these matters has led to many false doctrines and practices. Many have confused the stipulations of various wills. The result has been confusion regarding how man is saved, how he is to worship, what is expected of the heirs of God, etc. Some point to the prayer of the publican as the way of salvation, or the thief on the cross, not realizing that both of those people lived subject to a different will than that under which we live. The will of God through Moses did not extend past the death of Christ on the cross where it was taken away (Colossians 2:14). No person can turn to what was done prior to the will through Christ to learn what God wants of man now.

Before And After Death

While a person lives, he or she can distribute to his children, or any other, his benefits in whatever manner he sees fit, when he sees fit. But once that person dies, his benefits are distributed only according to his will. This was true concerning Christ. While on earth, Jesus could and did bless whomsoever He chose in whatever manner He chose. He had the power to forgive sins and did so in a variety of ways. (Matthew 9:2; Luke 7:47). He conferred many special gifts on people, conditionally and unconditionally, while he was living. But that has no bearing on how one receives blessings through Christ now. Since then has been the death of Christ, we now must consider His will. Only by complying to the terms of that will can His benefits be ours. We cannot be saved except by the stipulations of His will.

Hebrews 10:9,10, teaches we are sanctified by that will.

No one living has the right to change even one single feature of the will of Christ. In human relations, wills are sometimes broken and changed. But who is so presumptuous as to think they can change the will of the Lord? It was a will that took force only after His death. The apostles served in the fashion of executors of His will, declaring it through preaching as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, forbidding any alterations concerning it (Galatians 1:6-9). An attempt to change the Lord's will brings upon that person the wrath of God. His will is unchangeable and does not vary. All who will be saved must honor that will and do whatever it teaches.

Nobody can inherit another's estate if they are not included among the heirs. You cannot inherit properties that belonged to your neighbor unless you are included among his heirs. Who is embraced in the will of Christ? They are the heirs of God. The universal nature of this will is that all people are granted the opportunity to be an heir of God. Christ died for every man (Hebrews 2:9). The gospel of salvation is to be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15). Unfortunately, all do not come to God through Christ and are thereby depriving themselves from being heirs of God. There can be no salvation except through Christ (Acts 4:12).

Who Are The Heirs

Children born into a family are considered the legal heirs. Children that are adopted into a family are also legal heirs. In order for one to be a beneficiary of the blessings of God through the will of Christ, we must become an heir of God, a child of God, a member of the family of God, which is the church (First Timothy 3:15). The Scriptures present only one way to become an heir of God, but illustrates that one way in terms of being "born again" and also in terms of "adoption." These are not the only illustrations, but these are the two that are pertinent to our present investigation. Taking citizenship in the kingdom, enlisting in His army, being grafted as a branch, being a plant growing from the seed, etc. are other presentations of becoming a child of God.

We now focus our attention on the terms of adoption. There are laws in the will of the Lord that allows adoption and the inclusion of those not physically born into the family of God. Actually, none are now children of God by virtue of physical

birth as was true under the Mosaic system when one who was born of Jewish parents was automatically considered a child of God. That system of inclusion has been terminated. We all can become “children of Abraham” if we belong to Christ (Galatians 3:28,29). If adoption takes place, it must be according to law, to the will. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”* (Romans 8:14,15). Paul continued, *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together.”* (Romans 8:16,17).

“But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” (Galatians 4:4-7). Our question is, what must one do to be adopted in the family of God?

Only Two Families

Keep in mind that there are but two spiritual families. God is the Father of one; the devil is the father of the other. In the parable of Matthew eight, the tares are the children of the wicked one. Jesus once cited to some of His hearers, *“Ye are the children of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”* (John 8:44). Children of the devil reject Christ and His will. Of their own choice they refuse to leave the family of Satan, even though God offers the opportunity to do so. But God does not force His will upon any to become an heir of God.

Children of the Lord are those who have allowed themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads through the revealed word, which teaches us what to do to be saved. The law of adoption is another manner of presenting the plan of salvation. As for mankind, each must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of sins, confess faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ, into the body (First Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). As long as one loves and enjoys the society of Satan, he makes himself unfit for

adoption into the family of God. But those who hear the word of the Holy Spirit, which is in the Bible, and conforms thereto, he becomes an heir of God. He becomes an heir “*to an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.*” (First Peter 1:4). This inheritance is available to the rich, poor, king, beggar, bond, free, male, female, Jew Gentile, all men everywhere, in every nation, that will fear God and work His righteousness (Acts 10:34,35). It is open to you as it is to me. There is no reason we should deprive ourselves of this inheritance. Let us be disposed to honor God and respect the will of God through Christ.

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Give Us Something Practical

There has been a swelling cry against the pulpits and those who occupy them to become more attune to what some have designated to be the real issues of our day, the real needs of our time. The charge is leveled that churches generally have neglected their duty to keep abreast with the times and are too busy answering questions nobody is asking, talking about matters that are irrelevant and of no real concern. In papers, magazines, religious and secular, on television and radio, we hear the plea, “Give us something practical.” People want something that will solve their problems of the here and now.

There is no question that mankind has many problems. Many face unemployment, inadequate housing, the threat and actuality of war, prejudice, drugs, social injustices, racial discrimination, hypocrisy, riots, ignorance, diseases, pollution of every sort, etc. The magnitude of these problems has overwhelmed many into turning to the proclamation of a “social gospel” as if the mission of Jesus Christ to this earth was to provide a remedy for the mundane and materialistic matters. The burdens of life have provoked many to turn away from the spiritual message of salvation from sin, forgiveness, redemption, the right relationship with God, the church, concern of heaven and hell, the next life, etc. These things are called impractical and irrelevant.

Irrelevant Messages

We would have to agree that the messages coming from many pulpits today do not relate to the real needs of mankind today, but not in the way that many critics have thought. Most people do not seem to be aware of the real need of mankind, the cause of so many of his problems, and are totally ignorant of the solution of his real need, as well as those temporal and earthly needs with which some have become totally concerned. Some have embarked upon a crusade of social reform and material relief without changing the heart of the people. Some preach a “health and wealth” gospel, as if Christ died to make everybody healthy and wealthy. You would be led to believe that Jesus went to the cross for environmental improvement and physical provisions. Those who so think have become doctors of symptoms rather than dealing with the real cause and cure of the needs of man, here and in the hereafter.

Even some in the Lord’s church have been overtaken by this approach to where they have abandoned the mission and the message of Christ and are busy emphasizing the beneficial by-products of Christianity to the neglect of the heart of the religion of Christ. Even brethren are active in taking the church into recreational provisions, entertainments, food, fun and frolic kind of emphasis. Some have even gone so far as to involve the church in political matters to the extent that the church becomes not much more than a pressure group on politicians, leaders in social revolutions, and similar movements.

A Major Concern

True Christians will be concerned with the general state of things here on earth. It is practical and relevant to be concerned about the ills that beset the human family. But is it not more practical to be concerned with the cause of problems and the real issues of life? And these issues are not jobs, houses, money, clean air, etc. Nothing is more practical than an understanding of when, how and where the solutions to the ills of mankind really are. The problems of mankind, their cause and cure, are primarily spiritual in nature, not physical. These problems often manifest themselves in physical distress, but they are issues of the heart. So much that wreaks havoc in our world stems from the spiritual degeneracy of people and comes from the decay of the moral principles that Christ taught. We may patch and

bandage the physical forever, but no solution will be found apart from spiritual regeneration.

For a long time now, many people, even leading religionists, have scoffed at doctrine. They have decreed that doctrine does not really matter. They would have us all believe that what you believe is not that important. Isn't that strange? They are very concerned that you believe that what you believe doesn't really matter that much? Any philosophy that contradicts itself is not worthy of being accepted. Rather than doctrine, they urge that we preach something practical. After all, according to these social gospel advocates, one doctrine is as good as another, but they are very insistent that you accept their doctrine that doctrine does not matter. Standing upon the Word of God as our authority, we must contend and insist that Christianity is practical, the most practical doctrine that men have ever heard. Christianity deals with every phase of life, including problems. But it is doctrinal in nature, governing man's existence from the cradle to the grave, and into the world beyond this.

We Must Be Practical

To be practical means that which is usable, capable of being profitable. Inasmuch as **sin** is at the root of man's problems, what could be more practical than dealing with sin? Sin is a violation of God's law (First John 3:4). Sin has always buried man beneath havoc, confusion, frustration, hopelessness, fear, distress, and ruin. Some prefer to dismiss this fundamental truth about the existence of man, but they can neither prove it incorrect nor have an alternative explanation of validity. They just do not like the doctrine that says man is accountable to God. They want to do whatever they wish without the consequences of their actions and thoughts and deeds. Everything is acceptable, yet, so much of what people do brings them shame, disgrace and problems on top of problems. We must ask, "What is more practical than forgiveness of sins? What is more practical than providing hope for the hopeless? What is more practical than giving meaning to life? What is more practical than for the lost to be found? What can one suggest that would benefit mankind more than solutions to the threats against the home, the young, the old? Since spiritual contamination and spiritual death is the worst enemy man has, what is more practical than victory over such as that? Is there anything more useful than the escape from hell and entrance

into heaven? What is nobler than fulfilling life's duties? What can be more beneficial than avoiding pitfalls and preventing problems? Without submission to the will of **the authority** that is higher than man, people will never do better, be better or make real improvement.

The Primacy of Doctrine

But all these blessings are the result of conformity to doctrine, God's doctrine, God's laws. By conformity to these laws the heart of a person is converted and changed, and this results in a better way of living. Man cannot live by the material bread of this life. He must have the spiritual food that comes from God. History has shown that man is not capable of directing his own steps. Man's worst disease is sin and the blood of Christ is its cure. We cannot meet and overcome the problems of this life, let alone the next, without the right relationship with God, and that relationship is attained by doctrinal considerations. Nothing is more practical than that which accomplishes that relationship. People do not improve until their mind is improved. Our lot in life will not improve until we improve our life. The matters of the here and now with which some are totally concerned become better when people provide for the hereafter. Until they consider the hereafter, nothing in this life has any real meaning and significance. Until there is a recognition of God and His way, our existence is nothing and ends only in the grave and for no purpose. Nobody that pays attention to the world in which he lives doubts that it needs healing. The principle of Second Chronicles 7:14 still abides, *"If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."* *"Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people."* (Proverbs 14:34). If someone really wants to do something about the havoc in the world, if he is truly serious about making things better on earth, let him devote himself and encourage those around him to conform to the ways of God. *"The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them, but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness."* (Proverbs 11:6).

When people cry out today, "Give us something practical and relevant to our times, our needs, our problems," there is nothing better to offer than the words of Christ, *"Ye must be born*

again.” To have a better world, we must have better people. It begins in the heart. That is what the doctrine of Christ provides. The conversion that mankind needs is produced by the Word of God (Psalms 19:7).

The Practical Message

The most practical message men can hear is the gospel, its facts, its commands, its promises. Nothing is more beneficial than to learn how to apply the blood of Christ to the sin-stained heart. The beginning of a better world is a saved person that respects God. When one respects God he will respect morality, his neighbor, his duties. While the humanists, atheisists, materialists, social gospelites are running about denouncing the Lord's prescription and remedy, they offer nothing better than “a band-aid on a cancer.” They scoff at the only solution and practical answer that exists.

Following Christ, respecting His authority and doctrine in one's life will produce good. People will have self-respect, learn to work, and not be willing to be parasites upon their neighbors. Those in need will find provision from others who follow Christ because caring for those who cannot care for themselves is a part of Christianity. Taking drugs that destroy the body and mind will be eliminated when all people conform to the doctrine of Christ that the body is the temple of God. Prejudices will melt when people practice the Lord's “golden rule.” War will not exist if more and more would insist upon loving their enemies rather than killing them. Ignorance, poverty, hypocrisy find their cures in pure hearts, love without dissimulation and pretense, seeking the others' highest good. Hate can only be driven out with love. Is not that the doctrine of Christ? Sin can be replaced with righteousness. Despair can be dispelled with hope. Doubt can be replaced with confidence. What else can produce such as this except conversion to Christ?

Down through the ages men have followed first one theme then another. All the various philosophies of men have crashed against the rocks of failure because they are human and therefore limited and fallible. But the will of God for man has in the past, and does now when applied, produced that which man needs most, spiritual regeneration, and an abundant life here and the assurance and hope of an eternal happiness and blessedness with God for eternity. What could possibly be more practical than the doctrine that produces this for human kind?

We Must Obey

Adhering to doctrine will cause one to obey the gospel in faith, repentance, confession of faith and baptism. Adhering to doctrine will cause one to live righteously toward others and toward God. It will prevent apostasy and falling away. It will avoid the innovations, substitutions and counterfeits that men often put forward. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). What mankind needs is spiritual regeneration. Out of the heart comes the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). When the heart is right, the person will be right. When the person is right, the world will be right.

A father once gave his son a puzzle. When completed it would be a map of the world. In an unexpected short time the son had the puzzle completed and everything in proper place. The father was amazed and asked him how he was able to work things out so fast. The son replied, "There is a picture of a man on the other side. When you get the man straight, the world automatically becomes straight." As we call for something practical, we might do well to give that more thought, and give respect to that which gets man straight, which is doctrine, the doctrine of Christ.

† † † † †

What Church To "Join"?

The subject under consideration is one about which the world has many varied attitudes. We approach the study very conscious of the fact that the things we present shall be contrary to what many people have believed heretofore. But, as always, we only ask a careful and Biblical consideration for the things that are taught. We never encourage anyone to accept anything except what the Bible does teach. The study has to do with the church and is in the form of a question, "What church ought a person join?"

Almost everybody, except the atheist, infidel, agnostic, and those who are anti-Christian, expect to join some kind of religious organization before they die. We must take note that the number seems to be growing among those who do not have any specific religious affiliation. There is a real campaign against

“organized religion.” We share some of the complaints against “organized religion” because most of it comes from man, not God. But we must also keep in mind the church that Christ built is also organized. As we discard the “organized religions” of men, let us not cast out the religion that Christ organized. There are more and more people who have joined the “no church” movement. In a sense, they belong to the “no church” church.

Among those that believe the Bible to be the Word of God, there is not this same rebellion against organized religion. But even many of them have not yet decided which church to join. With several hundred different churches beckoning them to “join us” they have many opportunities to join something, but thus far, have decided upon no church. They visit around quite a lot, looking at this one, then that one. We suggest that this kind of “church shopping” would take a man wiser than Solomon to ever decide with all the confused, chaotic, contradictory situation that exists in religion. Many who take the course of action do become hopelessly confused.

Should We Join Them All?

It may sound strange to make such a suggestion, but how would you react to the idea of joining all the churches within reach? If there is good in all churches, and one is as good as another, and you can be saved in any of them, why not take advantage of as many as time will allow? Why cut yourself out from the benefits of any of them? Why not join them all? You buy insurance from different companies, not just one exclusively. You buy groceries at more than one store. You might even drive more than just one brand of car. Where did you get the idea that you can belong to only one church? If each one has something worthwhile to offer, why not get in with them all?

Now we must admit that many churches would not let you do this. But you ought to ask them, “Why not?” Why should they object to you belonging to a Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Pentecostal church all at the same time? Are they all good, according to their doctrines? Why should you limit the number? I never have had anybody to give me an intelligent answer to that question.

But I would never advise anybody to join many churches. In fact, I would never advise anybody to join any church. No, this is not because I am anti-organized religion. It is just because I

have never read anywhere in the Scripture of God telling anybody to “join” any church. Yes, I am a member of the church, but I did not become so because I “joined” it. This statement takes us to First Peter 4:11, where we are taught to “*speak as the oracles of God.*” The Bible does not speak of “joining some church, any church.” You will have to take my word for that until you have had the time to study the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, and prove that is true for yourself.

We best define what the church is; that is, the church revealed in Scripture. We are not talking about some physical building, more properly called a meetinghouse. There are many splendid edifices, representative of huge expenditures, but they are not churches. They are just buildings. All the building material in the nation cannot erect the church of the Lord.

A Building

The church is described as a building. “*And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; In whom ye are also builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*” (Ephesians 2:20-21). “*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*” The material of this spiritual building is people who have been born again, having passed from darkness to light. Paul, when preaching on Mars’ Hill said, “*The God that made the worlds and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.*” (Acts 17:24). The Athenians had their marvelous temples to their gods. But the true God has no such temple. Those who belong to Him are His temple (First Corinthians 6:19).

A Kingdom

What is the church? The church of the Bible is that spiritual kingdom over which Jesus Christ reigns as head and king, and in which the Holy Spirit dwells by and through the Word of God. It is the body of Christ, composed of people who have come to Him by obeying the gospel, being washed in the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. “*And hath put all*

things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Ephesians 1:22,23). “And he is the head of the body the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18). “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (First Corinthians 12:27).

The Saved

In the New Testament the word “church” is never used in the sense of a denomination. A denomination and the church of the Bible are not the same thing. A denomination is a religious organization that claims to be larger than a local congregation but denies being all the saved of the world. Compare that definition with the usage of the word “church” in Scripture. In the Bible a church is either the saved of all the world, or the saved in a given locality. A denomination is different from the New Testament church in both respects. In fact, we never read of a denomination in the Bible. But someone says, “The church is composed of all the denominations.” To make such a claim is to convict God of the most reckless kind of division and confusion one can imagine. Is God the author of the chaos that exists in the religious world? Is this what Jesus meant when He prayed that His followers be one, and when Paul taught that we all speak the same thing? Nobody can possibly conclude that God is the author of denominationalism. That is entirely the invention of man.

No Denominations

No denomination existed on earth until several hundred years after the Lord’s church had come into existence on the first day of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 2). We advise no man anywhere to become a member of a denomination. There is no divine authority to support the existence of even one denomination. You could memorize the Bible and be no wiser about denominations. The only thing close to a denomination you can find in the Bible is where Paul condemned the division that existed in Corinth. Denominationalism strives on, propagates, and promotes the divisive factors that characterize the religious world.

Can one be saved outside of a denomination? Even

denominationalists admit the answer is “Yes.” Can one be saved outside the body of Christ, which is His church? No person honest with the Scripture would say, “Yes.” Salvation is “in Christ” (Second Timothy 2:10), not outside of Christ (Acts 4:12). The church is God’s household, His family (First Timothy 3:15). Those in His family are His spiritual children. They are the saved (Acts 2:47).

Can one be a member of God’s church without being a member of a denomination? Not only can he be, this is what he ought to be. The people in the New Testament were never members of a denomination, but they were members of the church of Christ. I am a member of the church of the Bible and I have never belonged to a denomination. Many who are members of the church came out of denominations in order to be members of the Lord’s church. I do not see why some brethren have taken up the banner of soft-peddling the fact that denominationalism is religious error. Are they ashamed of the church? Do they fear the displeasure of men more than they seek to please the Lord? Why is there not a strong, definite, sound and certain cry against this human intervention in religion anymore? Do we think that maybe, somehow, in spite of God’s Word, denominationalism is acceptable after all?

Entering The Church

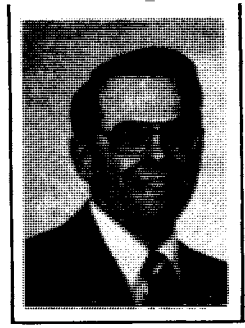
How did I become a member of the church? I became a member of the Boyd family when I was born into that family. I became a member of the family of God when I was born into it “*by water and the Spirit.*” (John 3:3-5). I did not enter the world and then shop around, looking for a family I might like and one that pleased me. I did not decide to “join the church” like somebody decides to join some club or association. Nobody voted on me when I became a member of the Boyd family. I became the child of my parents by virtue of being born of them.

Being begotten of the Word and born into the family of God, I thereby and at the same instant, became a member of the church, God’s family, because God added me to the church like He added those on Pentecost when they obeyed the gospel commands delivered to them (Acts 2:38-47). They did not become members because of their own merit, but by the merit of the blood of Christ. By virtue of something God did, when I met
(continued on page 10)

Seek The Lord

*"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found,
call ye upon him while he is near."*

When people are in such conditions as was Israel, it is to their advantage to search until they find the solutions to their problems. The only real solution to the plagues of society and individual lives is a commitment to the true and living God. Our text impresses us with the necessity of seizing the opportunity to call on the Lord while opportunity exists.



JAMES W. BOYD

This is an invitation very much like the call of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30. *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

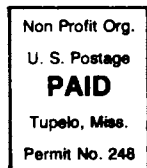
The tragedy of many is that they neglect this great business of serving God while they reach for other things that pale into relative insignificance. *"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?"* (Isaiah 55:2). We do far better to seek the Lord in this life and be mindful of Him.

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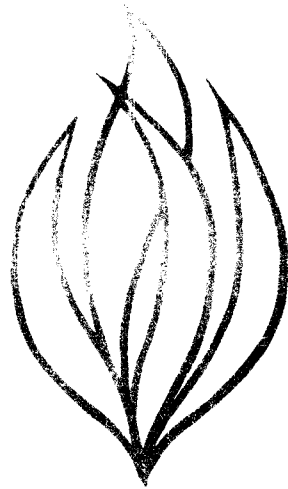
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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**EAST MAIN CHURCH OF CHRIST
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A Burning Fire



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



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What Is The Christian Life

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16). This verse, alongside many others, asserts among other things, that salvation is conditional. *“For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8,9). *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23). We learn that salvation is a gift. It is a gift, given by God, when man meets certain conditions. Those conditions need only be stated here for our lesson. One must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Thereafter, he is to live a faithful life as a Christian. But what is the Christian life? How can one know if he is living a Christian life if he does not know what that life involves? Obviously, we must not only know what to do to become a Christian, but we also must learn what being a Christian demands.

A Way Of Life

When we rightly understand the religion of Christ and the Christian way, we will understand it to be a way of living. We live according to a certain pattern and standard. It is not only the way that leads to heaven, which is the greatest of its benefits, but it governs the manner of everyday living, one’s outlook on life, including his attitudes, actions, words, thoughts, deeds, and goals. The Christian life involves every phase of life, every relationship, and occupies the entire person his entire time. There is never a moment when the Christian can forget that he is a Christian and should act accordingly.

We want to make a few general observations regarding the Christian life at the beginning, then concentrate on a few specifics. Although many have chosen to reject the Christian life, it is the best way of life one can live. This is not only so proclaimed by the Lord and exemplified in the life of Christ, but it is also attested by the thousands who strive to live it. It is *“the more excellent way.”* (First Corinthians 12:31).

Different

It is also a different way of life. It is different from the way most people live; different from what man would live if left to himself. It is different from the way of life one lived before he became a Christian. Those who are Christian have separated themselves from the wickedness of this world (Second Corinthians 6:14ff), and are a “peculiar” people (Titus 2:14). While most would live in sin for self and Satan, not so with the Christian. The Christian life is not worthy simply because it is different, but it is different because it is worthy.

Costly

The Christian life is a costly life. *“So likewise, whosoever he be among you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”* (Luke 14:33). *“Then Jesus said unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* (Matthew 16:24). All things of value have great costs. Walking with Christ is not always the smooth, easy path. It is often quite difficult and demanding. But in the long run, and after all is taken into account, the costs involved in living the Christian life cannot compare with the rewards received. *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”* (Philippians 3:7,8). *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* (Romans 8:18). With these general observations before us, let us turn our attention to more specific characteristics of the Christian life.

Faith

The Christian life is a life of faith. We believe in God because the evidence is too convincing to think otherwise. We are not blind and naive. We investigate the evidence and draw the only conclusion the evidence allows. Therefore, we trust Him and have confidence in His word. We are assured of His power and we are given hope by His promises. We live with a trust that what He says He will do and His will is eternally true. We may at

times be beset with trials and problems, even dangers, but we are confident of ultimate victory over all that which would destroy us because of Him.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28). This means that God has worked certain things that will be for the good of those who heed His call that comes by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it.”* (First Corinthians 10:13). This means that there is nothing that can happen this day that God and I together cannot handle. What a glorious promise even for the here and now! We can face each day with confidence, optimism, hope and vigor. Hardship need not lessen our faith, but only emphasize our need of God, our dependence on God, and serve as an opportunity to endure and be blessed (James 1:12).

We walk by faith and not by sight, confident that He careth for us and is mindful of us. He will overrule all things for what He sees is best for us, both now and forever. Christian living is a life of faith in God.

Worship

It is also a life of worship. *“God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:24). No person can be a faithful Christian who does not worship God. Worship is a rich, blessed privilege as well as a Christian duty. Christians never shun the opportunity to worship their Father, but seek the occasions to worship. They never look upon worship as something they “have to do” as much as something they “get to do.”

God has authorized how His children are to worship Him and revealed His way in His word. Man cannot honor God without honoring His word and confining himself to *“thus saith the Lord”* when it comes to worshipping God. Christians worship God through prayer, giving, singing, the Lord’s Supper, and teaching His Word. So vital is the worship of God that God has designated a day in which the saints are to assemble for such purposes. And these assemblies are not to be forsaken (Hebrews 10:25). To deliberately absent oneself from a period of worship

is to deliberately ignore a sacred Christian action.

The Christian life is one of self-denial, service, and sacrifice for God and for others. Someone has suggested that Christian service is J-O-Y, meaning service to Jesus, to Others, then Yourself. It is doing to others as you would do to you. It is being useful and helpful to those less fortunate. It requires one to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), putting others first, their welfare, their happiness, their salvation, their good (Philippians 2:3-4). Actually, this is what love is; namely, seeking the other's highest good. Behind every willing sacrifice is love.

Selflessness

The selflessness of the Christian life is rooted in love. Selfishness is the source of so much of the world's problems among human relationships. This is true between nations, in homes, even between brethren. Instead of asking, "How does this or that affect **me**?" the Christian asks, "How does this or that affect others?" Even more, what does God think about it? Christian living puts to death pride, self-righteousness, and self-exaltation. Rather it is giving of oneself to something and someone higher and nobler. To deny self is to set our affections on spiritual and heavenly matters, seeking first things first, giving the way of Christ priority in life before everything else. The prayer of Christian living is, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Self-Control

Along this same line, Christian living is bringing self under control and being disciplined. It is refraining from evil and doing what is good. "*Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good, abstain from all appearance of evil.*" (First Thessalonians 5:21,22). "*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17).

It is a paradox, but the one who gives of himself the most is the one who receives most for himself. Jesus taught, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" (Acts 20:35). The one who becomes a servant, will be the greatest of all (Luke 22:26). The one who humbles himself, shall be exalted (Luke 14:11). The one who remembers the Lord is never forgotten.

Purity

Christian living is living a life of purity. The Christian is to live a "pure religion" (James 1:27). "Keep thyself pure." (First Timothy 5:22). "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. Teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." (Titus 2:11,12). We are not to love the world (First John 2:15), because "friendship with the world is enmity with God." (James 4:4). In a world that makes mockery of a pure life, the Christian dares to be pure in morals, in tongue, in thought, in conduct, where he goes, what he does, what he condones, what he allows himself to support, that which he is a part, even his influence. Christianity never requires leaving off anything that is clean and wholesome and pure. Some of the most powerful negative instructions in the Bible have to do with the purity of one's life.

Purity demands abstinence from all unlawful satisfactions of fleshly appetites. The works of the flesh are not to be part of his life (Galatians 5:19ff). Purity forbids lying, dishonesty, stealing, adultery, drinking alcoholic beverages, immodest dress, filthy habits, dancing, "and such like." Purity requires producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22ff). It calls for truthfulness, honesty, godly living, and being a good example.

Growth

But the Christian life is also a life of growth. If we do not grow we shall become spiritually emaciated. We are born into the family of God as babes in Christ. As a new-born babe is expected to grow physically, so must the spiritual babe grow. It is not shame to be immature unless one has had time and opportunity to grow. It is shameful to not be growing (Hebrews 5:12).

Growth comes by adding the Christ-like virtues to our lives and character as Peter described in Second Peter 1:5-7, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity." We grow by feeding on spiritual food. "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies and envies, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (First Peter 2:1,2). We grow by spiritual exercise, "...and exercise thyself rather unto godliness,

for bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” (First Timothy 4:7,8).

Christians are expected to grow strong. *“Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” (Ephesians 6:10). “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong.” (First Corinthians 16:13).* We stand in line for rebuke if we do not grow. *“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14).*

Faithfulness

While the Christian life is not a life of perfection, it must be a life of faithfulness. We must “keep on keeping on.”

The Christian life is characterized by a spiritual warfare. It is a fight against evil and for the good. It becomes a struggle. But eventually there is peace, contentment, happiness, consolation for eternity. We are to fight the good fight of faith, war a good warfare, suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ. Satan and sin is the enemy. Truth and right is the cause.

The Christian life is much like an oasis in the midst of the desert. It is a haven from a stormy sea, a light in a world of darkness, a calm surrounded by a tempest, certainty and security in the midst of doubt and confusion.

Faithfulness as a Christian brings the eternal rewards. *“Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Galatians 6:9). “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).*

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In every trouble there is a blessing.

The trouble with trouble is that it starts out as fun.

A Great Announcement

We like to hear announcements and anticipate them with excitement. An announcement imparts knowledge and information. Sometimes it thrills us and sometimes it saddens us, depending upon the nature of the announcement. In the Bible, we find many great announcements, particularly with reference to Jesus Christ. *“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”* (Luke 2:11). This was a wonderful announcement of the coming of the Savior into the world, being born of the virgin Mary. *“He is not here. He is risen even as he said.”* (Matthew 28:6). What a joyful announcement of the resurrection of Christ.

But there was an announcement made that surpasses the marvelous announcement of the birth of Jesus and the resurrection. It is recorded in the second chapter of Acts, made by the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, at the climax of his sermon preached on that day. *“Therefore to all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* (Acts 2:36).

What does this announcement tell us about Jesus of Nazareth? First, it tells us that Jesus is Lord, that is, Master of all. He is approved of God. He is Deity. He is authority. He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Savior of mankind, the deliverer from sin. As such, He is the hope of the world, the light of nations, the Son of God. This is the greatest declaration of truth that has ever been made. Nothing exists that is of equal significance. So much else that we consider important rests upon the validity of this announcement. It states the identity of the One to whom we look for salvation.

Evidence

But what right and by what evidence did Peter make such an announcement? What proof could he offer? How could he expect people to accept what he was saying as the truth? To put things in perspective, let us understand that all that took place before Pentecost pointed toward Pentecost. All that follows after that notable day looks back at Pentecost. This was the day that the gospel was first preached in its fulness. On this day were the doors of God’s kingdom opened to mankind. It was then that

the first of the saved through Christ were added to the church. From that day until this the message of salvation has been heard to the saving of those who believe and obey.

The evidence that Peter cited was conclusive and convincing. The hearts of the hearers were pricked with the truthfulness proclaimed. They were convicted of their sins and cried out, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37). Peter had proven beyond question the validity of his announcement concerning the Christ. He had used four irrefutable facts concerning Jesus to support his declaration. It is our purpose to consider these four facts, as presented in that matchless sermon preached on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ.

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." (Acts 2:22).

Miracles

The miracles that Jesus did was evidence that He was who Peter claimed Him to be. Toward the end of His personal ministry, Jesus said, *"Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake."* (John 14:11). If any had doubts as to who He was, they should consider what He was doing and had done. Nicodemus recognized this weight of evidence early in the ministry of Christ and said, *"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him."* (John 3:2). When John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus from his prison cell to learn more fully of the identity of Jesus, He told them to *"Go and show John again those things which ye do see and hear. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."* (Matthew 1:4,5). Here was the evidence that Jesus was the One that should come and it was useless to look for another.

In John, chapter nine, we read where Jesus healed a blind man. Later that man was asked, *"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"* He said, *"Lord, I believe."* What convinced him? *"One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."* In submitting proof that Jesus was Lord and Christ, Peter was submitting the miracles of Jesus, miracles of which his hearers

were well aware. He said, "As ye yourselves also know." If ever there was a time for someone to deny that Jesus worked miracles, that was the time, rather than now, some two thousand years removed from their occurrence. But none denied. John wrote, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and believing have life in his name.*" (John 20:30,31).

Prophecy

A second irrefutable evidence Peter presented was the fulfillment of inspired prophecy. Speaking of David, "*Men and brethren, let me speak freely 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.*" (Acts 2:29,30). The prophets had foretold of the birth of Christ by the virgin, the place of his birth, his name, some things of his life, his death, burial and resurrection, his mighty works, and his kingdom. In fact, as Peter declared in Acts 3:22-24, "*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. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.*" One who was knowledgeable of the message of the prophets could recognize in Jesus their fulfillment concerning the Messiah and Savior of mankind.

Scriptures

Jesus said of the things in the early Scriptures, "*Search the scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.*" (John 5:39). Stephen disputed with those who rejected Christ and preached, "*Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now betrayers and murderers.*" (Acts

7:52). At the household of Cornelius Peter said, "*To him give all the prophets witness...*" (Acts 10:43). Christ did not come to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17,18). When Paul preached before Agrippa, he preached what the prophets said should be, and Paul said he knew that Agrippa believed the teaching of the prophets, the things that Moses and the others said should come (Acts 26:22).

In every instance, in minute detail, Jesus fulfilled prophecies concerning the Messiah. It was not coincidental nor accidental, but miraculous and providential. Peter used this evidence to sustain his announcement.

Resurrection

Peter then turned to the resurrection as evidence he was declaring the truth regarding Jesus. After saying of Jesus, "*Him delivered up by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay.*" Peter added, "*Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, for it was not possible that he be holden of it.*" (Acts 2:23,24).

As with the miracles, if ever there was a time for someone to deny the resurrection of Christ, that was the time. They were in the same city where Jesus had lived, where He had been seized, where He was tried, where He was humiliated and taken and slain and buried, and that only a few days previous to Peter's announcement. If ever there could have been presented evidence that Peter's statement was untrue, then was the opportune time. Certainly the objections raised then ought carry more weight than those raised thousands of years removed from the event and from the witnesses of the events. But none denied, nor could produce any evidence to the contrary. The tomb was empty; Jesus had been seen by many witnesses. At least twelve different appearances are recorded in Scripture. Once as many as 500 people at once saw Him. Peter said, "*We are eyewitnesses of His majesty.*" (Second Peter 1:16). John writes, "*That...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled...declare we unto you...*" (First John 1:1-3). In Acts 4:20, Peter stated forthrightly before the enemies of Christ, "*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*"

Paul declared that by the resurrection Jesus was declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). By the resurrection Peter proved

his announcement to be true.

But those who heard Peter did not have to rely on the words of the apostles and that which had been seen of them alone. Peter pointed out other evidence that his announcement was true that none could deny. *“He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.”* (Acts 2:33). To paraphrase, *“We have been telling you what we have seen and heard and know is true. But now the Lord has given you evidence for you to see and hear and you can know that which we are saying is from God and be convinced yourself.”* What was it the people were hearing and seeing?

Holy Spirit

They had heard about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles that came with a sound as a rushing mighty wind and as tongues of fire upon them. They heard these Galileans speaking in languages (tongues) that were not normal, native, and natural to them. These were languages the apostles had not learned, but were nonetheless able to speak and those from every nation were able to hear in their own language. Every man was hearing the truth in his own language. This manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit, this miraculous evidence that the apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit in what they were preaching, stood as evidence that the entire procedure was of God. True, some accused them of being drunk, but Peter convincingly refuted such a false charge. The accusation only goes to prove that even the scoffers recognized that something unusual was taking place.

What was the result of this inspired testimony and presentation of the evidence that Jesus was both Lord and Christ? Paul once wrote, *“Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17). The preaching of the word produced faith in the hearts of the hearers. They accepted the validity of Peter’s announcement. The evidence was too weighty to refute. They were convinced and convicted. When they asked what to do, they were told, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* (Acts 2:38). Some 3,000 heard, believed, and obeyed as they were instructed, and the Lord added them to the church (Acts 2:47).

This is the way people became members of the Lord’s church

on the day that the church came into existence. It is still the same way people enter the church, the body of Christ, the company of the saved, today. The church exists on the foundation that Peter's announcement is true; namely, that Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

Are You Convinced?

What think ye of the announcement made by Peter? Do you believe it? What think ye of the evidence Peter presented to substantiate his announcement? Is it convincing to you? Can you refute it? Do you dare disbelieve what is so evidently set forth, realizing that to do so is to bring ruination to your soul?

If you are convinced that Jesus is the Christ, then obey Him unto salvation. Repent of your sins and confess your faith in Him, then obeying His command to be baptized, being added to the saved, the church of Christ. Live your life in faithfulness in work and worship as a child of God. Those that do have the hope and assurance of an eternal life with God, because God *"hath made this same Jesus...both Lord and Christ."*

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Good Homes Good Churches

A former Bible teacher of mine told of visits he made into different homes, both homes of elders of the church. One had two married sons, active in the church. He said he came away from that visit thinking how good homes help make good churches. During the other visit he asked the elder where he had met his wife. It was at a worship service. They attended the same Bible classes, married at the church building by a faithful gospel preacher. They discussed how the church had been such a help to them through the years in times of trials, problems, and grief, providing strength, encouragement, comfort, and power to face difficulties. He said he came away from that visit thinking how good churches help make good homes.

It is certainly true that good churches contribute in the establishment and maintenance of good homes. It is also true

that good homes contribute to building and maintaining good churches. Like the two rails of a railroad track, they complement each other. Each is vital and necessary to the other. While in a sense independent, they are also dependent one upon the other. After all, both came from God and are divinely planned. One began at Eden and the other on Pentecost. Side by side they contribute to the welfare of each other.

Benefits The Home

Consider for a moment the benefit rendered by the church to the home. We might start by considering actual physical assistance that is sometimes offered. First Timothy 5:16 authorizes the church to offer relief where needed. Money, food, clothes, and physical care are all within the nature of the help the church can offer to those in physical distress. But more often there is the spiritual assistance, instruction, training, guidance, counsel, direction, encouragement, sympathy, fellowship, opportunity for worship and service and study that the church provides for every member of the home. The eldership has the watchcare for the souls of all who are members. This is a part of God's plan for keeping brethren from falling away.

Consider the benefit the church renders to the children in the home. They are involved in classes where they are taught from an early age. They learn to love, share, have respect for authority, seek higher levels of morality than what the sinful world would have them accept. They learn the value of honesty, purity, and self-respect. The church assists parents in the training of children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

One juvenile judge once reported that he had tried nearly 14,500 cases of young people under seventeen years of age. In only two instances did both parents attend Sunday school classes with their children. In only 93 cases were the young people attending classes at the time they got into trouble. Don't you see the good influence of such periods that are offered by the church? Don't you see why the church urges parents to bring and accompany their children in such activities? The home and church working together is of eternal as well as temporal benefit to young people.

But the benefit is not just to the young. *"The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their*

husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” (Titus 2:3-5). There is to be the coupling of Biblical instruction with practical experience of older Christians, taking advantage of the wisdom of godly people.

Opportunity To Worship

Then consider the value of the opportunity for worship that the church affords the family. Families worshipping together have a great bond. It is a true saying, “Families that pray together, stay together.” Children are impressed by example as they see their parents active in worship to God. They learn where true value lies. They learn to respect God and His will. No greater heritage can parents give to their children than a strong parental example of faith in God. Such worship opportunities are instances of the church taking an interest in families. This is one reason we should be repulsed at the idea of “children’s church” where children are removed from their parents and shuttled off somewhere else, deprived of the opportunity to not only learn as they can by word and by demonstration, but to witness their parents in devotion to God in worship.

Association

The church affords association with the finest people on earth. Yes, evil companionships corrupt good morals (First Corinthians 15:33), people of the church being together provide the fellowship for each other and make being a Christian a joy and privilege in this life. Good companions encourage good morals. The preventive side of Christianity is realized in Christian association. Many Christians have benefited immeasurably from fellowship with their brethren. In good times and bad times, Christians help each other get to heaven. They enjoy the wisdom and counsel, as well as the example, of godly people around them. There is no other conclusion that can be drawn except that good churches that are fulfilling the role God assigned to churches, help make good homes.

But let us now consider how good homes help make good churches. Have you read the recipe for a good home?

“You will need one husband, one wife, children to suit yourselves. Next, cream one cup of love until it is fluffy and

mellow. Add one-half cup of tears and hardships and stir gently. Whip in a cup of joy; when smooth, add one teaspoon each of thoughtfulness, heartfelt tenderness and sympathy. Add one cup of ambition with two cups of Christianity generally. Bake in a moderate oven, top with kindness and serve repeatedly.”

There is no passage in the Bible that begins, “The home should be...” The Bible does give specific and general principles however. This teaching includes instructions to husbands, wives, children concerning responsibilities, blessings, and privileges. Homes that listen to the teaching of the Bible will be of inestimable value to the church.

To Husbands

To husbands we read, “*Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*” (Colossians 3:19). “*Likewise, ye husbands dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.*” (First Peter 3:7). “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it.*” (Ephesians 5:25). “*So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.*” (Ephesians 5:28,29).

To Wives

To wives we read, “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.*” (Colossians 3:18). “*That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*” (Titus 3:4,5). “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*” (Ephesians 5:22-24). How this runs against the grain to those women who think they are smarter than God and are running around promoting what they mistakenly call equal rights and the feminist movement. One thing for sure, they are not very feminine, and are certainly

Jezebels as far as the teaching of God's book is concerned. How can things that are innately different, with different roles and purposes in life, ever be declared equal to one another in all matters? It is sheer, ungodly, defiant and rebellious nonsense. No Christian, man or woman, would lend support to such a concept. In our twentieth century some have considered the wisdom of God to be outmoded and outdated regarding the role of husband and wife. But they only show their own folly. When God's will is obeyed, homes will be better and the result will be that even churches will be better as well as the rest of the world.

David Lipscomb wrote, "The submission of the wife to the husband is that of love, respect and reverence which is befitting the relation she holds to her husband. In her sphere she is spiritually on an equality with man, but as a husband, he is the natural scripturally recognized head and leader of the family. Her submission must be in accordance with the principles of righteousness, and nothing is required of her inconsistent with Christian character. This submission of the wife, when rightly understood and practiced, accords with her inner nature, is in harmony with her relation to God and others, and is productive of the fullest development of her character, her mightest happiness and good."

The husband is not to be a tyrant. Wives are to be subject to their own husbands. It is not all that hard for a wife to obey God by being submissive to her husband when her husband also obeys God in his attitude and action toward his wife.

To Children

To children we read, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.*" (Ephesians 6:1-3). "*Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.*" (Colossians 3:20). It was said of Jesus when He was a child, "*And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them, but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*" (Luke 2:51,52). Parents are to be honored and obeyed. They are also to so conduct themselves that it is easy for children to obey God in this matter.

Parents are to encourage, lead, guide, instruct their young to

follow the Lord Jesus Christ. *“And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”* (Ephesians 6:4). In so doing, parents will be helping the church as well as the home. Good homes provide proper example for children to follow. Good homes uphold, rather than tear down, the church. Good homes put Christ and His kingdom first in all things. Then the home is as it ought to be as the church is greatly assisted.

Influence On The Church

The influence of the home regarding the church is tremendous. When both parents are united in Christ and active in the church, ninety-three percent of their children are faithful to the church of the Lord. When one parent is active, there is quite a drop to only seventy-three per cent remaining faithful. When parents are inactive, members in name only, only fifty-three per cent remain loyal to Christ. When parents worship irregularly, only six per cent remain faithful. This ought to give parents something to consider when they think of the spiritual welfare of their children and the spiritual climate in the home, and how one affects the other. The conclusion is again beyond escape. Good homes help make good churches.

But what of your home, your family, and the church of the Lord? You are a member of the home and possibly the church also. Is it not our duty before God to make both of these divine institutions as God would have them and to the greatest degree we are capable? When the church and home work together, good comes from it. When there is conflict and division between the home and the church, there is eternal harm. The place to begin to make both more as God wants is with each individual. My part begins with me, and your part begins with you. When members of the family and members of the church work together with one another and with God, all shall be blessed. It begins with becoming a Christian and continues with being what you have become.

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**The man who believes he can
do something is probably right, and
so is the man who believes he can't.**

Having Put His Hand To The Plow

Possibly all have known people who seemed to be people of great promise and potential to the church of the Lord, but who later quit the church altogether. I can think of several. They are people with many good qualities. Some were even teachers of Bible classes. But they became involved in other matters: seeking an education, having social goals, business interests, etc. It would be interesting, and possibly depressing, to know how many people have been baptized into Christ who now are going about their lives without any real concern for the soul whatever. What has become of those people? How many remain faithful to God? What is the present spiritual condition of those who once began but turned away? Surely, many have fallen by the wayside. You may even be one of them.

Jesus said, "*No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*" (Luke 9:62). Having once begun, and turning back, makes one unfit before God, unacceptable as a child of God, unfit for heaven after this life. It means spiritual damnation.

A Conspiracy

There is an ancient conspiracy of which we must be aware. It is led by the devil and his angels against all mankind. "*Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" (First Peter 5:8). The devil has a twofold purpose: (1) Keep men from becoming Christians and (2) Cause those who have become Christians to be unfaithful and fall away. His efforts are far too successful. His techniques are clever and effective. Many are persuaded never to come to Christ. They reject, and even denounce, the very Christ that came to save them. Too often Satan is also victorious in misguiding the Christian and provoking him to abandon that to which he once committed himself. The end result is the same in both instances. Both shall be eternally condemned. You cannot put your hand to the plow and turn back and go to heaven.

This is a very real danger, not an imaginary one. It is a

tragedy that can befall any child of God that is not alert. It overtakes some in their teen years. Even young people who have been reared in Christian homes, who have been active in Bible classes, can become indifferent, inactive religiously, disrespectful of the sacred truths to which they have been exposed. They begin to drift with worldly companions and grow away from the faith. The number of young people in the Bible classes in the pre-school age compared to the number of young people in the high school and college age levels confirms this loss. But the problem is not confined to any one age group. The devil can and does snare victims at any and all ages of life.

This is not just a problem unique to our time. Second Timothy 4:10 tells us of the man named Demas. Paul wrote, "*Demas forsook me, having loved this present world.*" When Jesus dictated to John the writings of Revelation and the letters to the churches of Asia, He said, "*But this I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.*" (Revelation 2:4,5). That once great and strong church in Ephesus had drifted to the point of being disowned. This is ancient evidence of the success of Satan.

Many Warnings

We have many warnings from the Bible regarding this danger. Even so great a Christian as Paul realized this danger. First Corinthians 9:27, "*But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage, lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.*" He wrote to the brethren in Philippi, "*I count not myself yet to have laid hold.*" (Philippians 3:13). Some passages in Hebrews center directly on the danger of falling away having once become Christians. (Hebrews 6:4-12; 10:26-31). These passages were written about those who once were close to the Lord, but left Him. No passage more strongly emphasizes the danger of falling away than that which was written by Peter in Second Peter 2:20-22. "*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto*

them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." There is not the slightest chance that these inspired writers ever believed or taught the false doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy, once saved always saved, the doctrine of eternal security, that once you come to Christ you will be saved regardless of what you do thereafter.

Causes

What are the causes for people turning back into the ways of sin they once rejected? Why do people reject the church of the Lord? Let us first learn that Satan's opportunities to ensnare us are enlarged when we are distracted. Complacency and self-satisfaction opens the door for digression. It seems as if those who were once made aware of their sins and lost condition would never become indifferent regarding it. But it is sometimes difficult to keep things vigorous and alive, fresh and active for an extended time. Like clocks, we sometimes need "winding up." There is a need for revival lest we drift. Have you ever wondered what happened to the tremendous church in Jerusalem, Rome, or Phillipi? Somewhere down the line they faded out. They were once great powers for the cause of Christ. But they must have become complacent, indifferent, cold, stale, inattentive to duty. Could that happen to the congregation to which you belong?

What is true of congregations can also become true of individuals. Too many have their names on church rolls that really are not impressed, nor display very much care and concern even for regular worship. In every congregation there are those who are sluggish and haphazard to duty. Why must people in the church constantly have to be prodded to serve God? Rather, they should be urging others to come to the Savior, not having to be coddled and pushed along by others. Complacency is one of the reasons.

Paul encouraged brethren, "*Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*" (Galatians 6:9). "*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.*" (First Corinthians 15:58).

Changes

Another cause of apostasy is lack of alertness during important changes that come in our lives. Environment plays a great role in influencing us. The change of job sometimes places us in circumstances incompatible with living the Christian life. To keep the job, one might gradually lose his interest and concern for the church. Even the hours that we work can become an infringement on Christian duty. The change of residence is always an opportunity for the devil to inject some discordant influence into one's life. Marriage is one of the more profound and far reaching influences upon a person. Marrying one with whom you do not share a common faith in Christ can be devastating to one's faith. Every Christian should seek his or her companion from among children of God. Parents need to teach their children to marry "*in the Lord.*" Even when babies are born into the home, the increased responsibilities, the extra time and work that is required, can be allowed to grow to a hindrance in serving God. We must realize that properly guiding our children, keeping the home, tending to such sacred duty is a part of being a Christian. Too often, and especially is this true with very young parents, we can allow the mundane matters that have their rightful place dominate and take over first place, even to the neglect to the worship of God. Change in life can create threats to faithfulness. With many it is like the little boy who was moving to another town, and upon leaving his former home, said, "Good-bye God, we are moving." This becomes very true in the lives of too many people.

Education

Seeking a secular education can be the provocation to apostasy. Some compromise their convictions once they are on the godless campus. When the immature and ungrounded youth are thrown into the den of modernists and evolutionists, the immoral activities that characterize nearly every campus in our nation, especially among state operated schools, the pressure often becomes more powerful than one's ability to resist. It is not easy to be a Christian when nearly everything and everyone around is yelling, "There is nothing to it but superstition. It is irrelevant. It is archaic. It is not the 'in' thing to be." On one campus a poll was taken among 200 students that enrolled who were members of the church. At their fourth year, only five were faithful to the Lord and His church.

Not all of the blame lies on the shoulders of the godless

schools and the “wiser than God” professors and anti-Christian students. While much of the blame rests there, some who are members of the church do not really lose their faith at college. The truth is, the college situation took advantage of the fact that they did not take very much faith with them. They went untrained, undisciplined, ill-taught, with a borrowed faith, never really coming to know the difference between right and wrong for themselves. They, and their parents, Bible class teachers, and others, wasted time during the formative years to instill in their hearts a personal, deep, sincere, conviction for truth. Once away from the environment that is favorable to being faithful, they meet opposition that overturns what little faith they may have developed. How important it is to see to it that the young know the truth for themselves.

Schools operated for the purpose of securing a secular education, operated by brethren, have historically been a great assistance to the home in preserving the values and standards upheld in the home. The goal is to provide a learning environment compatible with Christianity. This ambition is worthy and honorable. Too often in recent years, the Bible departments in “our” schools have become the primary funnel through which digression, apostasy from the truth, false doctrines, modernism, etc. have poured into the church. Too many “Bible professors” have drunk so deeply of the modernism where they attained their theological degrees, that they pour forth that same Satanic pollution upon unsuspecting and undiscerning youth, who in turn grow in the church with the distorted and twisted concepts. As a result, the Bible departments have become one of the worst enemies for the faithfulness of the church that presently exists. I know this is “blasphemy” to those whose love for school is more than for truth, but let us not be naive and blind to realities among us. We pray to God that those of the schools would return to their function and teach faith in Biblical truth, not the theories, philosophies, liberal apostacies that have characterized them so much in recent years. But we are not too optimistic that there will be a turn-around. “Scholarship” acceptable to the world seems to have become the campus god, rather than “*thus saith the Lord.*”

Too Busy

A prominent cause of digression and falling away among

many families and again it is especially true of young families that are “coming along” in building their homes, business, families, etc. is to become “too busy” with the affairs of this life to the extent that the Word is choked. They are so busy making money, pushing this and promoting that, that the church is crowded out of their lives. Social acceptance becomes paramount. Places of recognition in the community is of great desire to them. Bible study, prayer, converting the lost, worship, work of evangelism, all become second place, if included at all. First, they must make their mark in the world.

Sin

All ages are affected by the unwillingness to give up the old man of sin. We just won't cut loose from former ways of error. We have habits, attitudes, practices that are simply and downright unchristian. Yet, we hold on to them and try to live in the world and in the church at the same time, as if God will tolerate us anyway. But the man that steals must give up his stealing. The liar must quit lying. The one in adultery must leave the adulterous relationship. The drinker must stop drinking. The smoker must stop smoking. And on and on we could name many sins that we are prone to try to carry into the saved relationship with us as if it will be all right just the same.

When teaching is presented that shows that “*we that are dead to sin*” should not “*live any longer therein,*” (Romans 6:2), rather than give up sin, some give up the Lord that demands giving up sin. Some love sin so much that they are determined to persist in it. They are sometimes encouraged to have this attitude toward sin because other brethren disobey God in refusing to exercise the discipline toward such people that God has instructed. We must learn that being a Christian has its costs just like becoming a Christian does. “*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.*” (Ephesians 4:22,23). If we do not overcome sin, sin will overcome us.

Overconfidence

Finally, overconfidence has spelled disaster for many. Self-righteousness and the attitude that “it cannot happen to me” has been all the opportunity that the devil needs or wants.

“Look what I have done over the years. Surely, God is pleased with me.” “Nothing is going to cause me to leave the Lord.” In both cases, it may be true that one has been faithful. This is the way it should be. But, “*Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall.*” (First Corinthians 10:12). Did not Paul urge us to restore those who have fallen, but along with that teaching warn “*lest thou also be tempted?*” (Galatians 6:1).

We cannot ever rest on our laurels. The good deeds of yesteryear are fine to remember, but are nothing upon which to rely and relax. Each day has its opportunities and duties and we must meet them with the same confidence and vigor as those of yesterday were met. Some get the idea that because they did a good work in the past that they can now “take it easy” and coast the rest of the way. That gives the devil an opportunity to place something of his choosing into the thinking and practice of a person to fill the void and idleness.

Having the attitude that one is probably better than most other members of the church will be one’s undoing. We are not to measure ourselves by ourselves, nor compare ourselves with ourselves, because that is not wise (Second Corinthians 10:12). Other people are not the standard. Christ is the standard. More may be expected of us than others because we have more abilities and opportunities. You may be able to do more than someone else and it is therefore expected of us. To become satisfied with past accomplishments will inevitably mean a sliding back from what you ought to be.

Two Tragedies

It is tragic when one does not become a Christian. It is another tragedy when one has come to Christ, but later turns away again. Having once tasted of the good things of God, be steadfast and loyal. Faithfulness will bring us to the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

If you have fallen away, repentance, confession of sins, and prayer is the way of restoration. Heaven will be inhabited by those “in Christ,” but more specifically, those who are faithful in Christ. Those who put their hand to the plow and look back make entrance into heaven impossible, lest they repent.

† † † † †

Alpha And Omega

Revelation 21:6, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." This was an identification Jesus gave of Himself when guiding John in writing Revelation. It was a duplication of His words at the outset of the book (Revelation 1:11).

"Alpha" is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and "Omega" is the last. By these terms, Jesus summarizes His teaching and declares His Deity. The nature of Christ, the all-sufficiency of Christ, the total of God's provision for mankind's redemption through Christ is embodied in this description. Nothing needful is lacking concerning Christ.

There is nothing before Christ or after Him, the first and last, the beginning and end. The record of Scripture is enclosed between two utterances of God's Word, "*In the beginning...*" and "*It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega.*"

Do not these words emphasize His authority, unsurpassed by all the genius of mankind? Who else but the Son of God could make such a complete claim, the one of "*all fulness.*" (Colossians 1:19).

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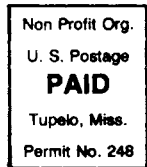
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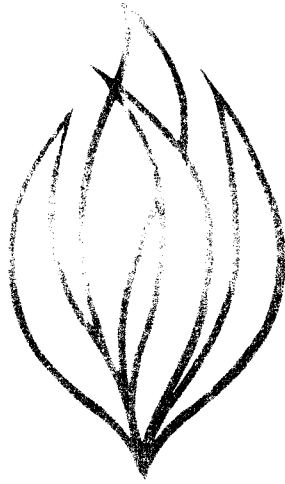
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JAMES W. BOYD



A Burning Fire



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

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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The False Front

Seldom did Jesus condemn anything more severely than he condemned hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a word from which all turn away with disgust. We would not want to be considered a hypocrite, nor can we speak more harshly of anyone than to refer to him or her as a hypocrite. Hypocrisy means playing a part or a role on a stage, to put on an act or practice, feigning and pretending to be what one is not, or to feel what one does not really feel. It is assumption of an appearance of virtue or of religion; the simulation of goodness when there is not the reality of goodness.

Hypocrisy is dishonesty; integrity replaced by deceit. It is akin to lying because it is living a lie. There is no better way to express the idea of hypocrisy than to refer to it as something counterfeit, a false front.

When I was young, our family made a trip to visit relatives in California. They lived not far from the movie studios which we also visited. We saw a beautiful little village the studio carpenters had constructed, with cabins, stores, a church building, even a jail. But actually there were no buildings at all. They were only the fronts that appeared to be buildings. Unfortunately people are sometimes like that, false fronts and appearing to be what they are not. Herod, the king of Judea when Jesus was born, asked where the child was, explaining that he wanted to know "so he could worship also." But he had no intent of worshipping the Christ. He actually sought the life of Jesus. Annanias and Saphirra are examples of two who wanted to appear to have been liberal in their giving when actually they lied about it (Acts 5).

A Bible Topic

The word "hypocrisy" appears only twenty-eight times in the New Testament in one or the other of its forms. It is found some additional times in the Old Testament where sharp condemnation of it is characteristic. Of the twenty-eight times in the New Testament, twenty-three times it was used by the Lord or in direct connection with His conversation. Let us read a few passages recording His words on the subject.

In Matthew six, *"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the*

synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.” (Verse 2). “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.” (Verse 5). “Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.” (Verse 16). The hypocrite is not generous, prayerful nor pious, but he wishes to appear that way before others.

In Matthew seven, “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” (Verse 5). Jesus condemns the fault-finder who does not take note of his own life and shortcomings.

In Matthew fifteen, “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Verse 7-9). Lip-service is a mark of hypocrisy. Saying, but not doing is hypocrisy. An example of this is found in Matthew 22:15-18. “Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?” Those that asked cared nothing for what Jesus taught, nor were they sincere in their compliments. They were seeking ways to trap him in what He said. Their “sweet talk” came with captious questions, but Jesus knew their hypocrisy. The strongest condemnation of hypocrisy by Jesus is found in Matthew twenty-three and denunciations of the Pharisees. Jesus taught people to do what the Pharisees said, but not what they did, because “they say and do not.” Again, “But woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites.” The same is found in verses 13,14,15,23,25. Over and over Jesus condemned them because they were fastidiously correct outwardly and made a grand display of being religious, but inwardly they were fools, blind guides, like whited sepulchers, full of dead men’s bones, outwardly appearing righteous but inwardly full of hypocrisy and iniquity. The most scathing

language recorded to have come from the lips of our Lord are found in this chapter where He denounced hypocrisy. The reader would do well to pause long enough to read the entire chapter and thereby get the Lord's attitude clearly in mind regarding this sin. Once His words are read, we are impressed with how hideous hypocrisy is in the sight of God.

Other References

Only five times do the words "hypocrisy" and "hypocrites" appear outside of the speaking of Jesus. In Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 9, "*Let love be without hypocrisy.*" Nothing is more wicked than a hypocritical love, a feigned and pretended love, whether it be between married partners, for the brethren, for children, for the Lord's will. It is as evil as anything one can imagine. As reprehensible is the performance of outward acts presumably for the purpose of worship and adoration of God, yet not really designed to praise Him nor reflect a genuine love for Him. Until we come to the place that we can love sincerely, we have yet to reach the heart of the faith of Christ.

Galatians, chapter two, reveals a moment of hypocrisy on the part of Peter and some other brethren when they withdrew themselves from association and fellowship with other brethren because the other brethren were Gentiles. It would seem that of all people who would know that Gentiles were acceptable to God as well as Jews it would have been Peter. He first took the gospel to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. But he allowed the prejudice of those around him to sway his actions and he sought to please the Jewish brethren. Paul rebuked him to his face for his "*dissimulation.*" (Galatians 2:13).

First Timothy 4:2, Paul warned of those who would be guilty of "*speaking lies in hypocrisy.*" James 3:17 tells us that wisdom from above is "*without hypocrisy.*" First Peter 2:1, "*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings...*" Hypocrisy was not to be characteristic of those who had come to Christ.

Areas Of Hypocrisy

The hypocritical false front is widespread and the temptation to be a hypocrite is ever before us. In school it used to be called "apple polishing." The student appears to be more worthy of the

teacher's consideration than he deserved. Sometimes hypocrisy raises its ugly head in courtship. The boy or girl wanting to impress others that he or she is more than he or she really is becomes an actor or actress. If there were not other reasons for an extended period of courtship, the opportunity to discover hypocrisy is enough. People who hurry into marriage too often find that the person they have married is far from the person they had been led to believe. Promises are often made which are not genuine and sincere. It is hypocrisy and pretense. The veneer wears through after a while and it is best to let it wear through before getting married.

Hypocrisy is quite prevalent in the business world. Most advertising is an exaggeration, if not entirely false. Every headache relief cannot be the most powerful. Every car cannot ride the smoothest. The temptation to deceive and claim more for a product than is actually true stems from covetousness and the love of money. Such gross overstatements are examples of false fronts.

The temptation to be a hypocrite is very powerful in religion. For instance, let us ask, "Why did you attend the services of the church?" The reason that God wants you to be there is because you love Him and seek to obey Him by showing that love and appreciation by doing those things He has authorized whereby His name is glorified and honored in worship. But do we come because we have the idea that being religious cloaks us with a mantle of respectability before others? Do we come merely for visiting others, conversation, seeing and being seen? Are we there because others have pressured us to be there rather than from a heart that desires to serve God? A person can appear to be very religious, pious, reverent, even well versed in Scripture, but if he fails to have a heart toward God, and fails in living in his life a style that is consistent with Christlikeness, is he not a hypocrite?

The Devil's Tool

More than any other weapon in the devil's arsenal against the church is the weapon of hypocrisy among members. It does more to damage the cause of Christ than all the forces outside can muster. For one to outwardly appear to be a Christian at the hours of worship, and then live like the world, slandering and cursing, lying and cheating, drinking and dancing, smoking and committing sins right and left, gives the name of "Christian" a

dirty connotation. It is a misrepresentation of Christ, and it is hypocrisy. For one to sing, "I love Thy kingdom, Lord," and then refuse to be involved in the work of the church, attendance at worship, righteous living at home, school, on the job, etc. is to mark oneself as a hypocrite. To display an outward piety but at the same time hold hate, envy, covetousness, greed, jealousy, vengeance, etc. in the heart is to be a "*whited sepulcher*." Has not the Lord and His inspired penmen condemned hypocrisy?

The Better Way

There is a better way to live than being a pretender. Hypocrisy never pays benefits and eventually pays destruction. How much better to be real, genuine, true and honest. Hypocrisy grows out of a desire to gain favor with other people. But we should seek the favor of the Lord. Hypocrisy erects a false front over the real person, but in time, it will all be exposed. If you would have the love and respect of people who love the Lord, build a character where there is nothing to hide, and if you want people of good will and worth knowing to be in your fellowship, win their respect by being inwardly as well as outwardly righteous. Let it be said of you as was said of Daniel, "*We shall find no occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.*" (Daniel 6:5). Let not our good be evil spoken of because of hypocrisy. Let there be no gap between what we claim to be and what we are. That may demand some changes in our thinking and actions. But let it be so. Too many are like chameleons, the little lizard that has the ability to change color according to its environment. That may be all right for lizards, but not right for anyone who professes to be a child of the Lord.

† † † † †

"Friendships are precious and should be preserved and cultivated. So often we keep ourselves so involved in our various activities that we forget those who have been our dearest associates on earth. Having lived in several places over the years while preaching the gospel, we have been privileged to know many fine Christians who are close friends. Surely, this is one of heavens blessings on earth."

Attitudes And Reactions To The Gospel

Studying the attitudes of people is a most interesting subject. The attitudes that people have toward someone or something determines their actions and reactions concerning it. The acceptance or rejection of the gospel plea reflects one's attitude toward the gospel, toward Christ, toward God, and toward things sacred and eternal in nature. It is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to get very far with someone in teaching them the truth, if their attitude is one of indifference, unconcern, or hostility toward it. This is true regarding any subject, whether it be mathematics, geography, social science, history, or the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Acts, chapter seventeen, we have reported to us numerous attitudes people of the first century had toward the gospel, and the resulting variance in action concerning it. We can expect people to have different attitudes toward different things. But in Acts, chapter seventeen, there were so many things that were exactly the same in each instance. There was the same preacher, the same message, the same approach, the same need. Yet, there were very different attitudes and reactions. What existed and is so easily noted then still exists today.

Now when they had passed through Amphilpolis, and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and rise again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ.” (Acts 17:1-3).

Preacher And Approach

Paul “*reasoned*” with his hearers. This implies a calm, deliberate, rational, intelligent discussion of the Scriptures. It was a discussion designed to create understanding and faith. There was nothing sensational, dramatic, entertaining or flighty about his approach. He did not try to win his hearers with words of wisdom or excellency of speech, appealing to the vanity of worldly acclaim. He simply took the Scriptures and taught them

the truth concerning the prophets, their message, what they said of the Messiah, and applied it to Christ, showing how Jesus is the Christ.

Two Reactions

There were two very distinct reactions to his teaching. *“And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”* (Acts 17:4). There was great acceptance on the part of many.

On the other hand, *“But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also, whom Jason hath received, and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.”* (Acts 17:5-9). Here was violent rejection, hostility, aggressive opposition against the gospel. The unbelievers created a near riot with the lewd and base elements of people, making charges for which there was no basis except ignorance, making no effort to investigate or prove what they were saying. It was an emotional, irrational, defensive reaction of rejection. They shut their minds to the truth, not even fully aware of what they were opposing. It was prompted by sheer and transparent prejudice. Yes, Paul did preach another king, King Jesus. But what kind of king did he preach Him to be? Jesus was not a competitor to Caesar. His kingdom is not an earthly one, but a heavenly and spiritual kingdom. But what a different attitude and reaction was seen in Thessalonica to the preaching of the gospel.

The Bereans

Then Paul went to Berea. *“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea, who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with*

all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:10,11).

In Berea there was the same message preached as before. Paul used the same approach, going into the synagogue. Of course, he was the same preacher. But there was something very different here. The difference was in the hearers. These were open-minded. They had a readiness of mind, a willingness to investigate and a desire to learn. They would inquire rather than be content to remain in their prejudicial ignorance. With this kind of attitude, as one might expect, there was a very different reaction to the gospel.

“Therefore many of them believed, also of honorable women, which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.” (Acts 17:21).

The truth is not offensive nor threatening to those who want the truth and love the truth. Even though truth is demanding, those who want to be right before God are grateful to learn what God wants. Truth often arouses resentment from those whose minds are so set against it that they will not fairly give it a hearing and look into the matter.

Trouble Created

Not everyone in Berea reacted with favor toward the gospel. The hostility that existed in Thessalonica was brought to Berea. *“But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither and stirred up the people.” (Acts 17:13).* The situation became so bad even there that it was necessary for Paul and company to move on. *“And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul and company to the sea, but Silas and Timothy abode there still.” (Acts 17:14).* There were those who so hated the truth that they not only did not want it for themselves, but they did not want any others to learn of it either. They were much like those of whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 23:13, *“But woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.”* There are those that would hear the gospel and accept it if it were not for others who sow seeds of prejudice and opposition in their hearts. The opposition against the gospel, and the proclaimer of it, was so intense that Paul had to leave and take the gospel elsewhere.

Athenian Responses

Paul then went to Athens. *“And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens; and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.”* (Acts 17:15).

Paul was now alone, as far as Christians were concerned, in the city of Athens, a very unique city. It was the intellectual capital of the world; one that was renowned for its architecture, literature, philosophy and worldly wise men of the age. It was a city of much learning. But it was also a city of heathenism, idolatry, superstition, uncertainty, and populated by those who sought knowledge for knowledge’s sake.

As Paul waited for his companions, the Scriptures tell us his *“spirit was stirred within him.”* In Athens we have the same preacher, and he makes the similar approach in the synagogue and market places, proclaiming the same message. His message seemed strange to certain philosophers because he taught the resurrection of Christ. Paul had aroused their curiosity sufficiently that they invited him to tell them more, taking him to Mars Hill and the Areopagus, the assembling place for the honorable men, thinkers, philosophers, and leaders of the city.

We will not here discuss the full sermon Paul preached there, but suffice it for our study now to say that he preached the true God as opposed to idols. He preached the judgment to come, the necessity of repentance, the resurrection of Christ. It was the resurrection that provoked such reactions as became so evident.

This whole thing may seem to have been a glorious opportunity for Paul to make Christ known to Athens, and the leaders of the area. But his hearers were not concerned with truth versus error. They were merely curious, only wanting to know what Paul was teaching in order that they might hear something they had not heard previously. They were intrigued by what was new, more than what was true. Those kind of people have not vanished from the earth. Their “broad-mindedness” was so extensive that nothing really mattered one way or the other. They were indifferent to any personal responsibility. They had no intention to make a decision about what they heard, even though their failure to make a decision was a decision not to decide for Christ.

The attitudes and subsequent reactions to the preaching of the gospel in Athens were varied. Some mocked. Others said they were interested, at least enough to want to hear more at a later time. Some clave to Paul and believed, but they were few. Doubtless, there were those that went away as indifferently as

they had come, having satisfied themselves in hearing some new thing.

A Variance In Attitudes

In these three cities, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, we see the same man, with the same message, and the same approach. But what a variance in attitudes of the hearers and their reactions. There was rejection, hostility, opposition. And that age was not the last to react to the truth in such a sinful fashion. But that is always the case with those that love darkness rather than light. There was indifference, curiosity, and unwillingness to listen in order to be persuaded. When there is unconcern, no real care about right and wrong, this is what can be expected. Many today, who are wise in their own eyes, who have drunk deeply from the wells of so-called intellectualism and learning, consider it beneath their “scholarship” to make a serious and fair-minded inquiry into the gospel of Christ. They already have such a superior attitude regarding themselves because they have spent much time in studying the philosophies of men, that they really cannot submit themselves to seriously consider the lowly Nazarene. Unless they have invented it, they feel it must be something less than deserving of their time and study.

But there was also acceptance by some. There was belief because there was a desire to learn the truth, a willingness to weigh the evidence, and a sense of responsibility to truth. Those that believed were not gullible, blind, naive nor easily led about. But they were open, investigative, inquiring, willing to discuss the issue. They learned, not for the sake of just learning, but for the sake of making application of what they learned.

The Saving Reaction

Of the three attitudes, only the last will save. The first two means condemnation. To reject, or ignore, the gospel means damnation. Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). What is your attitude? To which group in Acts seventeen do you belong?

† † † † †

Born Of God

We find the phrase “*born of God*” several times in the New Testament. Most of these times it was written by the apostle John. It conveys an important Christian concept and we need to be aware of the spiritual meaning and significance of it. Our study shall center on the phrase as is found in the books written by John.

First, let us understand the term “*born.*” When we speak of one being born it refers to that which has been begotten, generated, produced, given life and existence. To be “born of God” means to have been given life by God. When one is born of woman he is the product of the woman with the woman as the parent. The woman gives life to that which is born of her.

A Symbolic Phrase

We sometimes use the phrase in a symbolic sense but with the same basic meaning. We speak of something being born of poverty. For instance, some person may be very successful financially because of the persistent effort put forth to reach such success. When searching for the motivation behind the hard work, we may find that the quest for riches was born of poverty in one’s earlier life. Courage is sometimes born of fear and necessity. Patience is born of adversity; that is, it is a product of adversity. Weakness is born of indulgence. Strength and trust is often born of experience and age. In the same general sense, a person is the product of God; God being the source and parent.

In one sense, all men can be said to be born of God. Physically we have all come from the first parents, Adam and Eve, that God created. Through God’s laws of procreation have we all come. But the phrase in John’s writings does not refer to physical descendancy, but refers to a spiritual relationship we can have with God.

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:11-13).

Christ came to the Jews first, but they refused to accept Him as the Messiah that had been prophecied by their own prophets. Under the influence of their leaders, even the people of

Nazareth where He grew to manhood refused to acknowledge Him as the Son of God as He claimed.

But some did receive Him and recognized Him to be the Savior. This was true among both Jews and Gentiles. Those that accepted Him as the Savior were given the power, the right, the privilege, to become what they were not; namely, sons of God. Their mere belief did not make them sons of God, but their belief was the first step toward becoming children of God. Once they believed and obeyed what the Lord commanded, they were sons of God. Their faith gave them access into the grace of God (Romans 5:2).

We Are Born

Children of God are those that are born of God. One is not a child of God due to any fleshly parentage or heritage. While the Jews emphasized the physical ancestry as being the avenue of being a child of God, the will of Christ makes it plain that one's parents are not what brings one into the relationship of God as Father and child. Children of God are not born of the flesh, nor by following the will of men. Children of God become so by virtue of following God's will. By faith, an obedient faith, we become sons and daughters of God and are said to be "born of God."

"Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." (First John 3:7-10).

Christians Can Sin

Some have suggested that this passage teaches that the children of God cannot sin; that is, it is impossible for them to sin. But this would contradict so much else that the Scripture teaches regarding Christians who do sin, that it must be an erroneous interpretation of the passage. In fact, in this same epistle John speaks of Christians who sin and how they can be

forgiven (First John 1:8-10). So we know it is not teaching the impossibility of sinning. The words, "cannot sin," "sinneth not," "committeth sin," have reference to continually, habitually, willfully continuing in ways that are sinful. The present tense of verbs in the Greek language, the original language chosen by the Holy Spirit, has the idea of "keeping on" in the action mentioned. The passage teaches that those who are born of God will not "keep on sinning" as they had before they were born of God. Being born of God, they are now new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17), and will not continue in the ways of unrighteousness. As Paul stated, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" (Romans 6:1,2). It is not expressing the doctrine of impossibility of sin, but the incompatibility and inconsistency of sin in the lives of those who are born of God. The person who is "born of God" is no longer a servant of sin, but a servant of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18).

Love

Verse ten concludes by mentioning the characteristic of love in those who are born of God. And this introduces us to the next use of the phrase "born of God," that we shall consider. "*Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and every one that loveth is of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another.*" (First John 4:7-11).

In these five verses, love is mentioned eleven times. There is an inseparable tie between love and being one who is born of God. A child of God is a person who loves. Love is an important stone in the foundation of Christianity. Our very religion came into being because of the love God has for mankind. It is perpetuated by love. It will prove to be of eternal benefit as well as temporal because of love. God loved us (John 3:16) and we love Him in return. Christ demonstrated His love by giving His life for us (John 15:13). Christians are to love.

"*O how love I thy law,*" wrote David. (Psalm 119:97). The first and greatest commandment is to love God. And the second

is like to it, to love thy neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). Peter admonished, "*Love the brotherhood.*" (First Peter 1:22,23).

One who is lacking in love reveals something amiss in his life. The lack of love is not like the Father. God is love. His children should be as He is. Those that are born of God will love that which God loves. We are told that we do not really know God if we do not have love.

"And now little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." (First John 2:28,29).

Righteousness

There is a trait of character and life of those born of God that is called doing righteousness. There is an emphasis on the fact that there is something that the person born of God must do. Being born of God means that one lives a life of action, work, service, doing the Father's will. "*To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17). We cannot be passive, inactive, lethargic, and indifferent if we are to be the children of God. Those born of God are not of that persuasion or disposition. Their lives are lives of activity to the glory of God. We do what God calls righteousness.

Obedience

What is the "righteousness of God?" Psalms 199:172 says, "*All thy commandments are righteousness.*" Paul said the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16,17). It is the way God makes man righteous. It refers to the commandments of God to man by which man does the will of the Father. If we are to be born of God and live as one who is born of God we are expected to do these commandments. Some of the Lord's commandments are positive. There are those things that we are to do. Some of the commandments are negative. There are those things which are forbidden and from which we must totally abstain. Honoring parents, doing good to all men, especially those of the household of faith, remembering the Lord in the memorial feast of the Lord's Supper are examples of positive commands. Not to lie, steal, commit adultery, etc. are negative commands. All of these are included

in the righteousness of God.

Because of the righteousness of God we can be acceptable to God. Acts 10:34,35, *“Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.”*

Thus far, we have seen that *“born of God”* means belief in Christ by which we have power to become the sons of God. It means loving what God loves. It means living and doing in everyday behavior and conduct the way and manner of Christ as the will of God reveals. Possibly we can summarize with a generalized statement. *“Born of God”* means faith, a faith that requires obedience. It means a love that will obey. It means a determination to live a life apart from sin by obeying his commands. It means doing what God declares is righteous. Ultimately, *“born of God”* means being a submissive servant of God, not only in obeying the first principles in coming to Him through Christ, but living a life after the example of that Christ.

“Born Again”

One is *“born of God”* when he is *“born again.”* We are born into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5). The kingdom is the church and the church is the family of God (Matthew 16:16-18; First Timothy 3:15). Those in God’s family are His sons and daughters.

First John 5:1-5 presents to us a rather complete definition of the phrase directly from Scripture. *“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.”*

† † † † †

Sources Of Youth's Problems

To say that the youth of our land face many problems is not to reveal anything new. Every generation of youth has faced problems. But this particular era of our nation's history seems to offer the young problems that were not always that pressing on some other ages. Their problems seem to be more dominant, if not of different kinds than some before them have had to face. Everywhere we see the young confused, frustrated, involved in riots, rebellion against authority, steeped in crime, and the age is characterized by suicide. Certainly this is not true of all the youth, but it is true of a distressingly large number of them. Juvenile delinquency was a problem when I was growing up, but the proportions of misconduct have reached epidemic levels. Just yesterday on the news reports (April 7, 1982), one explanation for a slight decrease in the crime rate was that there are proportionately fewer young people. This is a sad commentary on the youth of the land. But we are inclined not to place the full blame for this deplorable state of affairs on the young.

In Genesis 42:22, *"And Reuben answered them saying, Spake not I unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold, also his blood is required."* Reuben had urged his brothers not to mistreat their younger brother, Joseph, but they paid him no attention. It is possible for those who are older to sin against the younger. Those who have the responsibility of caring for the young are often guilty of sinning against the very ones for whom they have the watchcare. A child is not born into the world wicked, evil, delinquent. He learns to be that way. He is taught to become that way. It does not come from within himself. In this lesson we want to locate some of the present day sources of problems for the young.

Many Fine Youth

We first need to emphasize that all young people have not gone and are not "going to the dogs." Not all are long-haired, beer drinking, dope taking, immoral and degenerate rabble.

Experience with young people over the past thirty years convinces me that many are fine, stalwart, strong, serious, well-intentioned Christians. True, even some of these are misled by others into ways that are not for the the child of God. But there are those who shall stand for the faith as much as any adult.

But many have serious problems and guidance is sorely needed, if they will give it a fair chance. We who are older need to consider more closely the problems of the young and work for them and with them to overcome them rather than simply hope that everything will work out all right. Too many of the older generation have played Pilate and washed their hands of the youth as if nothing can be done. For the sake of the good young people, we need to do something to correct the trends of godlessness that have come so heavily upon the youth of the land. We need to treat the sources and causes of these problems rather than simply wail over the symptoms. While the problems are sometimes complex and not easily resolved, the major causes of the problems are not really that far beneath the surface.

The Home

The number one source of youth's problems is the home. Where there ought to be security, love, provision, guidance, standards, discipline, hope, example, there is often just the opposite. Home has become not much more than a temporary filling station for many families. Respect for this divine institution has been undermined by many. The proverb, "*Train up a child in the way that he should go...*," is primarily directed to parents. "*Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,*" is the medicine needed. (Ephesians 6:4). Children are learning to disrespect their parents and many times it is because the parents have been beyond respecting. Parents are too busy making money, reliving their own youth, having a "good" time to be parents. The modern idea of motherhood is to have a career outside the home and leave the rearing of the children with somebody else. In most cases where there is trouble with children, you will find mother was outside the home, being the "liberated and modern" woman, but one who has sacrificed her primary role for the paltry offering of a sinful world. Let all the society holller and cry that it does not make any difference, but the fruit produced shows otherwise.

Children learn disrespect for authority in the home. It carries into the school, against civil government, against God. Keeping the home is the noblest work of women and because that has been smeared in the minds of so many, the children suffer.

Parents

It is rather difficult for a child to grow up with stability when the two people the child loves most hate and despise each other, and show it. Divorce has created problems for youth that can never, ever, be erased. The selfishness of parents, seeking their own, has placed the welfare of the child on the "back burner." In homes where father and mother and child learn to love God and each other and are regular in worship, there are few cases of juvenile delinquency, very few and rare. Children that come from divided homes suffer all kinds of maladjustments, unhappiness, confusion, insecurity, and build resentment and frustration. J. Edgar Hoover said, "Almost invariably parents are to blame for the development of young criminals." We can add that almost invariably parents are to blame for their children not becoming Christians. They have not taught them, set the right example before them, consider their inconsistencies of no consequence, and as a result, son and daughter either never become Christians or leave the church shortly after leaving home

We read about neglected children and it touches the hearts. But any child that is not taught the way of the Lord, and does not have parents that try to live the way of Christ before them, is a neglected child. We can all be grateful for the homes where God reigns supreme.

Schools

Problems are caused for the young by the schools. While we have a great appreciation for school teachers generally, there are those who are servants of the devil. This is not because they are unfair, or poor teachers, but because of what they teach and promote. While many can credit their teachers with a large measure of their personal success, many others can credit their teachers with their problems also. I have long considered the public education system to be one of the greatest enemies of the truth of God and His church because of some of the things done to the young in these schools. I once thought "Christian schools"

were the answer, but more and more, because of the false doctrines and false doctors in these schools we have to consider them as one of the primary sources through which digression is pouring into the church. Just what is the remedy for such things, I am not quite sure. But the problem is obvious.

Many teachers on nearly every level make fun of religion. They have often been trained in humanism, atheism, skepticism, and they teach this in their classrooms. Many teachers consider religion just a haven for the weak and timid of the world. Some textbooks even state such. False theories are taught as truth, theories that contradict Biblical teaching. Great effort is made by some teachers to destroy any confidence the young may have in the Bible. Evolution and humanism are the primary guiding principles governing education in most schools. This is why there has been a veritable rash of private schools arising. It has not been so much the hatred of racial intergration, as some would have us believe, as it is the disgust of God-fearing parents with God-hating teachers.

You teach a child that he comes from an animal, and he will likely act like one. Teach him he comes from God and he will aspire to be like God. Morality is scorned, drug use is prominent, peer pressure is detrimental and so often the social events are designed to promote the worldliness that the Scripture condemns, such as drinking, dancing, lasciviousness, etc. Even the emphasis for getting an education is to get more money rather than be able to be of more service.

Administrators and teachers have become so sensitive to the demands of the "experts" and the so-called "scholars" that God and His ways have just about "flunked out" in so many schools. This has a damning influence on the young who are exposed to this environment.

The Media

None who are informed doubt the harmful effects of radio, television on the youth. Freedom of the press has been so abused as to include every kind of glamorization of sin. The youth are exposed to the lurid, lewd and obscene as if it should be socially acceptable. Pornography has become a present-day rage. Have you ever checked the magazine racks near campuses? For the love of money, merchants will sell anything, and the undisciplined, immoral, anti-Christian youth will buy it, absorb it, practice it. The movies appeal to the young with all

manner of vile and corrupt pictures. The level of vulgarity that once was reserved for the backroom and houses of ill-repute are now blatantly and openly placed on the screen publicly.

The writers wallow in the mire of murder, rape, brutality, sexual immorality, theft, etc. Their minds must be “garbage pits” considering what comes out of them. The criminal is exalted, the divorced are the heroes, fornication is the norm, drunkenness is everywhere, and you cannot hear a program almost anywhere without profanity and obscenity. Do you really think this has no effect on the young impressionable mind as he hears this day in and day out? The addiction to television has about destroyed the thinking capacity of many people already, and replaced it with them becoming mere buckets into which the money-makers pour their filth for the dollar’s sake. Let the television industry disclaim responsibility all they wish, they have lied so often, acted irresponsibly too many times, refused to face the facts and really just don’t care if they get their money. What we think comes more from what we see than any other one source. “*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*” From what we are seeing in movies, on television, in magazines, etc., we can understand why the thinking of so many is so sordid.

Know The Difference

It is the responsibility of Christian parents to make sure that their young people know the difference between these sinful ways of the world and the way of Christ. Permissiveness and tolerance toward such things is going to cause many young people to degrade themselves and so stain their hearts and lives that only hell can burn away their evil. Is it not a shame that these marvelous means of communication cannot rise to a higher level than what is generally characteristic?

The Government

The government must assume some blame for the problems of the youth. The ambitious and unscrupulous politicians have so fouled up much of the business of the nation that the young are “turned off” from being responsible citizens. The greed, graft, and personal gain of the nation’s leaders have set a terrible example before the young. Power, popularity, and profit have dominated the careers of governmental leaders. Wars are even provoked for the sake of gain, and the lives of the young are

disrupted, if not totally sacrificed.

Someone has said that three parties govern our land, the Republican, Democratic, and cocktail. How much of the nation's business is conducted by people under the influence of the alcoholic beverage. Sometimes you would think that everything has come from the mind of a drunk. Statesmen are few and far between, and their voices often drowned out by the lying, immoral, double-dealing, insincere power hungry politicians. Our young see these things, and it does them harm.

Government has too long set the example of living beyond its means. It has for too long rewarded the immoral with support, the trifling and lazy with food and shelter. It has interfered with the homes by trying to influence and dictate concerning matters that belong to the home, not the government. All such things complicate the lives of the young. What a tragic shame that the government has so often thrown its weight behind such movements as the feminists that would defame God and His ways. Now the legitimacy of killing unborn children is sanctioned by the government. It ought not be, but the forces of righteousness are often in a to-the-death battle with the power and influences of government.

Churches A Problem?

But where you would expect to find solutions to the problems facing the young, you often find another source of problems, and that is religion, even the church. Can it be that the churches of our land are causing the problems many are facing? Yes, with the confusion, compromises, division, inconsistency, the charlatans, modernism, social gospel advocates, have so polluted what is called "Christianity" until those who have any sense of decency and consistency are repulsed by it all.

Atheism is growing rampantly in this land. One of the causes is the division of denominationalism. Men have loved their churches, creeds, doctrines, power, money, etc. more than the revealed will of God. With all the varied voices shouting this and that, what are the young to think? What is anybody to think? If God is behind all this, He is more confused than most of us. Why turn to Him? But God is not behind it, but is opposed to it. What exists is not what God has commanded. Men are going their own way, not the way of the Lord.

Churches have so changed their doctrines to accommodate sin, like divorce, drinking, morality, etc. that the churches are more

governed by the world than having an influence in the world for good. It is commonplace for churches to sponsor gambling and dancing. Some churches are involved in politics and business ventures, even business of producing whiskey, wine, beer, cigarettes, etc. Civil disobedience against laws that have no moral persuasion whatever has been instigated and actively pursued by religious leaders. Rebellion against authority has been the watchword in recent times by the very ones who have forsaken the authority of God for their own authorities.

Worldliness

Immodest dress, smoking, drinking, cursing, multi-marriages, empty pews, have even invaded the Lord's church in large measure. Whereas churches of Christ were once known for their opposition to sin, in so many places there is such a compromise with it, you had just as soon not have anything to do with such congregations. They have become nothing more than a poor man's country club and the gospel is hard to come by.

Problems, problems, problems. Distressing to consider them, isn't it? But the solution is still God's truth. We cannot answer for every home, school, media, government, and church. But we will answer for what we do, and don't do. Why we keep placing these stumbling blocks before our young is hard to figure. But we have the task of paving the way as much as we can, removing the stumbling blocks when we can, and teaching and showing the young how to avoid and overcome such things that cannot be totally removed from the scene.

They Are Not Adults

Young people are not just little adults. They are young people that need the love, guidance, training, discipline, love and security that those who are older are obligated to provide. Once given those things, it is up to them to walk accordingly. God has given the young parents for some reason. It is past time for many of us to find what those reasons are and get on with the divine task of rearing the young in God's way. It is not enough to simply tell the young, "Don't, don't, don't." There must be the provision for the good that they can and should do. The problems are too big for the inexperienced and untrained youth to handle alone. Possibly we need to "get off his back" and "walk by his side." Every child deserves the teaching of Christ

and a Christlike example. That is the only solution to youth's problems. Be a "solution," not a "source" of them.

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Religion In Politics

Politics is not the business of the church, but religion is; namely, the faith and religion of Christ. Only those more defensive of their politics than the faith of Christ would deny it.

"Morality in politics" has been advised, but some object. Do the objectors prefer immorality, or no morality in politics? Is there any realm of life where morality ought be outlawed?

Church and state are separate institutions (Matthew 22:21). Does this grant the state the right to suppress religion? There are many who would destroy religion, especially the faith of Christ, such as communists, humanists, atheists. While we advocate no state religion, we must protect freedom of religion from those who would destroy religion.

Many are confused regarding tolerance. To be tolerant means to allow to exist. It does not mean to agree, nor does it prohibit opposition to doctrines and beliefs. Christians are tolerant of others, but do not accept as true whatever others might believe when it contradicts the Lord's Word. We contend, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Is It A Worthy Issue?

Does one's religious faith have any bearing on what he should support? What one believes determines what one is likely to do. When a man asks for my support for him to rule over me, should I consider his acceptance of Humanism? Should his belief that one should have the right to kill unborn children affect me? When he thinks we are all just highly evolved animals, is this important? If he wishes to place homosexuality as an admissible life style, should I consider it? If his allegiance is to the Pope of Rome before the Constitution, is this fair for me to consider?

Sometimes politicians, lacking legitimate issues, conjure up something they believe may appeal to the prejudices of others. Some have ridden into high office on the appeal of their running mate and a display of religion, but then denounce opponents for

suggesting that religion and morality have an important place in national life and in candidate selection. “**Righteousness exalteth a nation...**” is a Biblical declaration and we should applaud the efforts to exalt righteousness, morality, ethics, and the dignity of the human being.

If anybody should demand that we make a specific religious faith the state religion we would oppose them with all of our power. This is one reason we stand opposed to the forces of atheistic communism and Humanism. The purge of religion is one of the ambitions of those philosophies and to stamp out belief in God is a major goal. Humanists have worked to capture the educational system, media, and governmental power to demand that one keep his religion to himself and keep quiet while they proceed to outlaw all remnants of morality and religion from national life.

We are accustomed to the “silly season” before elections. But we are not amused at the blatant threats made against religious freedom and the protective cover some politicians would grant the anti-religion forces as they seek the erosion and destruction of religious liberty and practices.

We are not so naive as to think the national politicians are going to be New Testament Christians as all people ought to be. Choices are seldom, if ever, between a non-Christian and a true New Testament Christian. Neither are we going to be blind to that which more closely reflects the basic principles of the faith of Christ. We choose between imperfects. But sometimes the choice is clear and distinct.

Think what you will, but it is true, “**In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.**” We take this admonition seriously in every realm of human activity in which we are involved, whether it be business, recreation, politics, home, church, whatever! If we should not, why not?

Our nation will be better if more people who hold to the moral values and standards as taught in the Bible under Christ would exercise their influence in the selection of those who govern. For too long good people have stood back, doing nothing, hoping everything would be all right, but refused to get involved and act according to what they profess is the standard of their life, the doctrine of Christ. We encourage morality in politics and encourage Christians to utilize their influence on election day to support candidates who more nearly share those same values.

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Shortage Of Doers

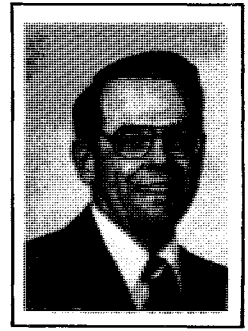
Jesus criticized the Pharisees and warned His hearers, "*But do not ye after their works: for they say and do not.*" It is quite evident that all those of a similar position are not dead. So many people talk a strong religion, but when it comes to doing as the talking, then the story becomes different.

James 1:22, "*But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*" The theme is the same as Jesus taught.

Is there not a shortage of people who will do the work that is needed?

It is easy to find people who cry, "*Lord, Lord,*" but those who will do His will are harder to find (Matthew 7:21). It is easy to find people who want the church to prosper but who do not work for its prosperity. It is easy to find people who complain about the evil in the world, the rampant immorality on television, the raging alcohol and other drug problems, the crimes. But all they do is complain. When it comes time to do something, they crawl into the shell of "do nothing."

Edmund Burke said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." This may explain evil's gains.



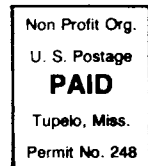
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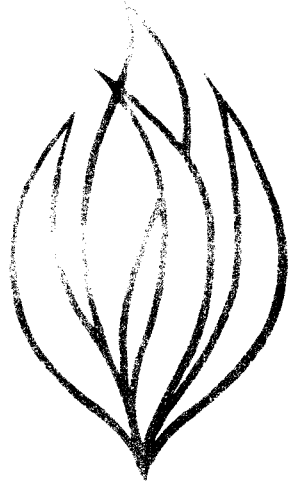
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A Burning Fire



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

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Is The Bible From Heaven Or From Rome? Number One

When we speak of the Bible we have in mind that book that contains sixty-six books, beginning with Genesis and continuing through Revelation. We reverently refer to it as the Word of God. It claims to be inspired of God and all-sufficient for us. Our study is concerned with the origin of the Bible as to whether it has been preserved for us by God or are we indebted to the Roman Catholic Church for the Bible. Has God given men this book or are we to give thanks for the Roman Church and its hierarchy?

Romanism claims to have given the world the Bible. Repeatedly they claim that the Bible is a Catholic book. They claim to have compiled it, preserved it, and given it to the world. There is a tract printed by the Roman Church entitled, *The Bible An Authority Only In Catholic Hands*, which shows they believe they have the exclusive right to interpret the Bible because they gave it. The booklet is actually an imaginary debate between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant, and both sides of the argument offer an abundance of error and misunderstanding of both Scripture and history. But be that as it may regarding the tract, did the Bible come to us through Rome?

As Christians, we should be vitally concerned about this subject. The Bible condemns those who preach and teach and practice error, just as it commends those who proclaim and follow the truth. We are fortunate that we do not have to make this investigative inquiry as either a Catholic or a Protestant. Men can be Christians, no more and no less, without Protestantism or Catholicism. True Christianity knows nothing of either one.

Not A Catholic Book

For many reasons, we deny that the Bible is a Catholic book. Catholics claim they gave the Bible to the world at the Council of Hippo in 390 A.D. This is obviously not true, inasmuch as the Bible was in existence as early as the second century. The most complete manuscripts of the Bible have never been in Catholic

hands. Even older versions of the Bible are in existence that Roman Catholics never possessed. These older versions do not contain the Apocrypha (doubtful) books that the Roman Catholic Bible contains.

Catholicism has not been a defender or preserver of the Scriptures but destroyed as many copies of the Bible as they could find. They have suppressed the reading of it, teaching people that only their priesthood could understand it anyway. People have been persecuted for reading the Bible, and hatred beyond description has been manifested by official Rome for translations of the Bible that gave the Bible into the hands of the common man. Catholics admit they do not study it because they are never encouraged to study it. They study the Romanist catechism instead.

We do not have to rely upon Catholicism, or anyone else, to know that the Bible is the Word of God. The proof of what the Bible is can be determined by the book itself. If the Bible were a Catholic book, you would think they would have a greater respect for its teaching than is obvious in their doctrine. We want to proceed by showing how Romanism disrespects the Scriptures, ignores them, contradicts them, and attempts to discredit the Bible. Surely, if it was their book, such things would not be.

Are They “Fathers”?

Catholics call their priests “Father.” They say this is based on the fact that Paul called Timothy his “*beloved son in the faith.*” They also cite Paul’s statement to the Corinthians, “*...for in Christ Jesus by the gospel, I have begotten you.*” Of course, Paul was never a Roman Catholic priest.

Calling a priest or anyone else with a religious title such as Father is a direct violation of the teaching of Jesus. “*And call no man your father upon the earth, for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*” (Matthew 23:9). Jesus and Paul did not contradict each other.

Romanists admit this is not a prohibition to calling one’s fleshly male parent by the term “father.” The Holy Spirit has done that often in Scripture. So it must mean it is wrong to use the term in some other sense than with reference to one’s physical parent. Jesus was speaking of honorary, spiritual, religious titles and He forbade it. Alongside His strong denunciations of pride and special distinctions, which characterize the Pharisees as well as

Roman Catholic clerics, Jesus rebukes the ecclesiastical, self-exalting, special titles that men heap to themselves to show distinction in religion.

You never read of Reverend Peter, or Your Highness Paul, or Your Excellency James, etc. Paul spoke of Timothy as his “son in the faith” because Paul was instrumental in Timothy’s conversion. There is no Biblical authority for Timothy or anyone else to call Paul “Father Paul.” The Corinthians were begotten by Paul only in the sense that he preached the gospel to them. They were actually begotten by the Word (First Peter 1:23). Why not call Paul, Farmer Paul rather than Father Paul since he said, “*I planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase.*” (First Corinthians 4:6). Rather than using titles, which so many preachers seem to think is vital to their recognition as a “man of God,” Romanists and Protestants alike should cease this sinful practice. No person who respects the Bible will allow such titles to be assigned him. Not even the terms “doctor,” or “brother,” or anything else, ought to be used as some kind of ecclesiastical, religious title. One might be called an elder, preacher, deacon, etc. because he serves in that work. But these are not titles to be worn among brethren. How can Romanism claim to have given the world the Bible when they are such violators of this simple teaching?

Idolatry

Catholicism includes the worship of images, which the Bible forbids. We are aware that they deny that they worship images. They only admit to worshipping Deity by the use of images.

When Christians worship, they are to worship “*in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). When Jesus promised His apostles that they would be guided into all the truth (John 16:13), is it not significant that He never guided them into the use of images in worship? The early church did not use them and such practice is but another innovation of man.

Even the Israelites were forbidden to make graven images. God does not condemn artistry, sculpturing, painting, etc. He forbade using these things in worship. He condemns the adoration of them, bowing before them, praying to them, serving them. Even though Romanists may deny that they show such affection for images, the toe of the stature of Peter in Rome has been worn away because of the kisses Roman Catholics have placed upon it.

Those that bow before images, making “the sign of the cross,” will say that they worship what the image represents, not the image itself. This may sound as if they have escaped the commandment against idols and images. But please take note that this is precisely what the Israelites did at the foot of Mt. Sinai when Moses did not return when they thought he should. Aaron fashioned for them the golden calf. He said, “*These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*” Aaron and the people knew that the physical golden calf did not lead them out of bondage. What they were doing was making a “*feast to the Lord.*” (Exodus 32:1-5). These actions are defined by Paul (First Corinthians 10:7) as Idolatry and he condemned it.

Their “Ten Commandments”

It is more than significant, it is very telling, that in Catholic catechisms where the “ten commandments” are listed, the second commandment which condemns making graven images is omitted. To make ten commandments, they make the tenth, which forbids coveting, into two commandments. A very telling blow can be leveled at Romanists when one compares their own Bible and their own catechisms with respect to the “ten commandments.” They do not agree. Their Bible includes the condemnation of graven images, but their catechisms which they study leave it out. If the Bible was their book, why would they do that?

“Pope Peter”?

Catholicism teaches that Peter was the first pope. Yet a pope cannot be married, and Peter was a married man because he had a mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14). Romanism claims Peter left his wife after he assumed his papal duties. Now is not that strange that the “vicar of Christ” would violate the teaching of Christ regarding the life-long relationship of marriage and desert his wife to serve as the representative of Christ on earth? Do we have Pope Peter violating God’s law from the start? Many “popes” since then have not had much respect for the sacredness of marriage and sexual relationships.

Catholics cite the fact that Peter said they had left “*all things*” to follow Christ. They say this includes his family. But if it included his family why did he not leave Andrew, his brother?

Furthermore, Paul claimed he had a right to lead about a wife as much as Cephas, who is Peter (First Corinthians 9:5). Peter did not leave his wife.

Again, Peter said he was an elder or bishop (First Peter 5:1). According to the pen of Paul, an elder must be a married man (First Timothy 3:2-5). We do not want to forget that Paul warned that one of the marks of the apostasy would be those who would forbid to marry. The doctrine of the "*celibacy of the priesthood*" is error from top to bottom. There is no special clergy and priesthood class in the Bible among Christians, inasmuch as every Christian is a priest, let alone the prohibition of priests to marry. But this doctrine has changed in many parts of the world among some Catholics, and with papal approval, although, papal objection still lingers among much of Roman Catholicism, Gregory VII, said celibacy was voluntary, but also decreed excommunication for anyone receiving the sacraments from a married priest. So how do Catholics claim the Bible as their book? Celibacy is never binding on Christians when they have the Scriptural right to marry. Peter was never a pope, nor has anyone else ever been a pope with God's approval.

Purgatory

Catholic doctrine teaches that there is a place called "purgatory," a place of cleansing after death, with fire and punishment. One dies and goes to purgatory to get the evil burned out of him for various periods of time. The doctrine has supplied millions for the coffers of the Roman treasury because for various fees, prayers can be made for the departed to hasten their exodus from purgatory.

The doctrine is a doctrine of salvation by works. One can stay in purgatory long enough to get to heaven without the blood of Christ. It is a doctrine of second chance, which the Bible does not teach. Nothing about purgatory is found in the Bible. It comes from some of the apocrypha books, and has been enlarged and expanded into a basic Catholic doctrine.

The Bible teaches that the dead shall be raised (John 5:28,29), both good and evil and be judged. The Lord will separate the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25), and nobody will be given a second chance to get right with God. Rome admits that the early church did not subscribe to this doctrine and was not fully developed until 590 A.D. If the Bible is a Catholic book, why does it add doctrines that Paul prohibited?

Mariolatry

Catholicism teaches things regarding Mary, the mother of Christ, that is hard for one acquainted with the Bible to imagine. They worship her on an equality with God and Christ. She is the "Mother of God." She can even mediate for our salvation, they say, in spite of Paul's teaching that there is one mediator, and that is Christ (First Timothy 2:5).they say that the Bible says there is only one mediator, but that does not mean there cannot be another. How do you reason with people who talk such double talk?

Not only do they pray to Mary, saying she will make God do things that the Son could never get done, but they pray through their "saints, angels, etc." The same book that says there is one God says there is one mediator. While we may pray on behalf of one another, there is only one approach to the Father and that is Christ (John 14:6; First Timothy 2:5). Catholics have written, "We shall sometimes be sooner heard and saved by invoking the holy name than that of Jesus our Savior." In the *Glories of Mary*, page 149, we read, "We sooner find salvation recurring to the mother than the Son." This is blasphemy. They not only deny the Biblical teaching, but deny Christ, His mission, claim we are saved through others. Are not these points sufficient to prove to any honest mind that the Bible is not a Catholic book?

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Is The Bible From Heaven Or From Rome? Number Two

In this lesson we shall continue to look at the inconsistencies that exist between Catholic doctrines and the Biblical teaching. While Catholics like to have others believe that they have given the world the Bible, the fact is that there are few religious organizations that has as little respect for the authority of the Bible as does the Roman Church. If the Bible was a Catholic book, as they claim, surely there would be more consideration of it than what characterizes the Roman religion.

Inherited Sin

Without reviewing the previous lesson, we examine their doctrine of inherited sin. Keep in mind that many Protestant groups have adopted this false teaching unto themselves as well as Catholics. But the doctrine teaches that a child is born guilty of sin, doomed, damned, guilty because of the original sin. Children who die without something having been done to cleanse their souls will suffer eternal punishment. The doctrine goes under a variety of names; such as, the doctrine of inherited sin, born in sin, guilty of the original sin, total depravity because of being born in sin, etc.

Realizing the dire condition that this doctrine places upon children, men have invented additional doctrines and practices to alleviate the problem for children. Among them is the practice of "infant baptism," which seldom is a baptism at all, but a sprinkling of a few drops of water upon the head of a child, who as often as not expresses his great disapproval by incessant crying, but who has no control over the matter, let alone having any understanding about the procedure to which he is being subjected. There have been those who have considered God a most cruel God because the doctrine teaches that the innocent, helpless child is damned through no fault of its own. The child has no control whatever over his or her destiny.

But the Bible teaches, "*The son shall not bear the iniquities of the father.*" (Ezekiel 18:20). To be a sinner one must transgress

the law of God because that is what sin is, a transgression of the law (First John 3:4). *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* (Ezekiel 18:20). In the case of the child and the Romanist doctrine, the soul that has not sinned shall also die because of the sin of somebody else. Infants do not sin, are not capable of understanding, are not accountable and responsible before God, do not have the capacity to do those things that Scripture teaches one must do to be saved (hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized). We shall all be judged (Second Corinthians 5:10), but according to the things we do (Revelation 21:12,13), not according to what somebody else has done. We influence each other, but we are not to give answer for each other. That is something each must do individually. Even the Douay Catholic Version of the Bible reads, *"Who will render to every man according to his deeds."* (Romans 2:6). It is not according to the deeds of Adam or his ancestors. Salvation and condemnation is determined by what we do in life, and not by what somebody else does. There is no such thing as inherited guilt of sin.

There is no doubt that descendents suffer many consequences for the sins of those who have gone before them, but guilt of sins is not one of those consequences. All of society suffers because of the drunkard, but all of society is not guilty of drunkenness. A man's sins may bring reproach upon his entire family, but his family is not guilty of his sins. The sin of Adam brought sin into the world, but we are guilty of sin only because *"for that all have sinned."* (Romans 5:12). If the Bible is a Catholic book, then we wonder why Catholic doctrine is so much at variance with what the Bible teaches. There are other reasons showing the innocence of children, such as the statements of Jesus comparing children with those in His kingdom. Why would Jesus want people to become as children if children were lost? What advantage is there to be in the kingdom if those in the kingdom are as children?

"Infant Baptism"

Just an additional word about "infant baptism." Without the doctrine of inherited sin, there would be no cause for such a practice. But the Bible teaches that there is *"one baptism."* When that passage was written, the baptism being practiced was baptism in water by the authority of Christ for the remission of sins of those who had heard the Word, believed it, repented of

their sins, and confessed their faith in Christ. Who can teach the infant the plan of salvation? This “infant baptism” practice was not prominent even in the apostate church until the fourth or fifth century, hundreds of years after the Scriptures were completed. Is it not significant that the Bible teaches nothing akin to infant baptism? Did not Christ come to save the lost, but yet, everyone born is lost and not a word is said what to do about the infants?

Romanism teaches that sprinkling is baptism, as do many Protestant denominations who have borrowed from Rome rather than followed the Bible. Romanist historians admit that for over twelve centuries baptism was by immersion. The practice of sprinkling for baptism was “legalized” by the Council at Ravenna in 1311. It began because some were considered too sick to be immersed and at first had much water “poured” over them. Gradually the amount of water used was lessened, until sprinkling was in vogue. Sprinkling and pouring are substitutes for what the very word *baptize* means. It means to dip, plunge beneath, submerge, bury, immerse.

As one studies the record of baptisms where the action is under discussion there is no room for doubt that baptism is immersion. When Philip baptized the Ethiopian (Acts 8:36-39), they both went down into the water. While this possibly could happen and sprinkling follow, is this what is practiced when one is sprinkled? Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:3,4, both call baptism a burial. The Roman brethren obeyed a form of doctrine delivered them in order to be saved. The doctrine was the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The form of that doctrine is to die to sin, be buried in water, and be raised to walk in newness of life. Only immersion, not sprinkling or pouring, can qualify as the “form” of that doctrine. Romanists have been able to embarrass many Protestant groups who claim the Bible is their sole authority but who will also practice sprinkling. Sprinkling came from Rome, not the Bible. To practice sprinkling ought to embarrass anyone who respects the Bible.

You Cannot Understand

The Roman Catholic clergy teaches that the “laity” cannot understand the Bible anyway. In this they are like Pentecostals and others who claim one must have a direct operation from the Holy Spirit before he can even understand what the Scriptures teach. In so many religious groups there is this superior attitude

manifested that only a select few can possibly know what anyone ought to do, and everybody else ought just sit back and keep quiet and accept whatever they dictate others to do. We even have some of this attitude among members of the church who have bowed at the altar of so-called "scholarship" of brethren who have drunk deeply from the wells of modernism, and liberalism.

The Scriptures make no such distinction between "clergy" and "laity." There are no special priests (all Christians are priests), or popes, cardinals, etc., such as characterizes the Catholic hierarchy. The priests are called the "official interpreters" of the Bible, in fact, of everything. We wonder why Romanists, Pentecostals, and others who believe they have the monopoly on understanding the Scriptures, ever quote the Bible to us when trying to prove something. Have not they already told us we cannot understand it, but only they have that ability? Why waste the Scripture on those that cannot grasp it even if they wanted to do so?

It is evident that the Scriptures are given so that we might know the truth. Why else are we taught to study? Why else did Paul write his epistles? He said they could be understood (Ephesians 3:4). Why would God give us a book and then prevent us from understanding it and condemn us for not obeying? When the prophets of the Old Testament read the law, they taught it and the people could grasp it. Is not the question asked, "*What saith the law?*" What difference would it make what the law said if nobody but the "special interpreters" could grasp it? Paul said the things written aforetime were for our learning (Romans 15:4). But if we cannot understand it, what did he mean? The things of the past are for our admonition (First Corinthians 10:11). This shows they can be understood. Colossians 4:16 teaches that the letters were to be read in the churches. Why do that if only the "official interpreters" could understand it? Friend, such a doctrine is nothing more than to keep hold on people by persuading them they cannot know until some self-appointed, self-acclaimed, expert tells them what to do. What use is it to warn against following men and then concoct a doctrine that makes following men essential? The reason the priesthood has been able to exercise the domineering power over many peoples and lands thus far is because they have kept people ignorant of the Bible, and one of the ways they have done that is to tell people they are the only ones who can really know.

Catholics cite Second Peter 1:20 as a “proof text” against others interpreting the Bible. But the text speaks of the origin of the Scriptures. It did not come from the minds of men, nor is it any man’s interpretation of God’s will. It has nothing whatever to do with getting the meaning of what is written, which is all an interpretation is. For a people who claim the Bible to be their book, they sure go to great lengths to keep people from coming to a knowledge of it.

If God could not give us His will without going through some human and his interpretation, why give us the book at all? If we cannot understand what God caused to be written, are we sure we can understand what God’s “official interpreters” have to say about it? Maybe we need an official interpreter to interpret what the official interpreters have interpreted.

Confessions

Then consider the Catholic practice of the auricular confession; this periodic necessity of bearing your soul and confessing your sins to some Roman priest. (The “Crossroads” philosophy has a similar perversion to it.) The teaching, “*Confess your sins one to another,*” (James 5:16), not demanding going before those not involved as “telling all.” It certainly does not say tell your sins to your “prayer partner” or some Roman priest. If “lay” members are to confess to the “clergy,” then why should not the “clergy” confess to the “lay” members? This is “*one to another.*” The whole idea is a control mechanism over the lives and minds of others.

What right does some bachelor priest have to say to anybody, “I absolve thee”? Does he think he is God? Claiming to be the successors of the apostles, and the power to forgive sins, they do not even understand that the way of forgiveness of sins by the apostles is through the word of reconciliation that they preached. It was not to them to personally decide what is to be forgiven and what is not. The priests even claim more than the apostles.

This auricular confession practice is a product of the Council of Trent, 1545, far removed from New Testament Christianity. Catholics have claimed that their religion does not change. Nothing has evolved more nor changed more, contradicting itself more, than historical Romanism. But the “*word of the Lord endureth forever.*” (First Peter 1:25).

Pope Worship

Lastly, there is the worship of the pope. However, this does not complete the end of false doctrines and practices of Rome. "We do not worship the pope," some are heard to say, but they do. They think him infallible. They bow before him. They call him "Holy Father, His Holiness, etc." They kiss his ring. They carry him about on a throne on their shoulders. They do more for the pope than was ever done for Christ.

Poor Peter! He did not realize he was a pope, but had Cornelius stand up when Cornelius bowed before him, saying he was also a man. The papal infallibility was not recognized until 1870, and then declared retroactive. The problem with that is that they had an infallible pope contradicting other infallible popes. But when you do not respect the Bible anyway, what difference does that make? Once in history there were three men, all laying claim to the papacy at the same time. Romanists contend some were imposters but the line of succession of popes stems from some they claim were imposters.

Is the Bible a Catholic book? The Bible is a Catholic book about as much as the United States Constitution is *Mein Kamp* of Hitler or Karl Marz's *Das Kapital*. The Roman church is an outgrowth of apostasy from the truth, the mother of many denominations of apostasy, powerful, grasping, greedy, deceptive, vicious, and soul-destroying. The Bible is God's book, not from the Roman Catholic Church.

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Gospel Meetings

What is a gospel meeting? It is the opportunity for the gospel and mankind to meet. This is essential for one to be saved inasmuch as the gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16).

We have four goals in such a series of meetings. (1) To preach the saving gospel to the lost who are out of Christ. (2) To recover those who have fallen and need to be restored. (3) To strengthen and build up the saved so they will stay saved. (4) To worship God in spirit and truth.

Incalculable and eternal good can be accomplished in a gospel meeting when everyone involved does his or her part in attaining these goals. Every soul saved, restored, and strengthened is a glorious bonus of gospel meetings.

Solomon's Request

Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”* So we turn to the Old Testament and study an event in the life of Solomon recorded in First Kings 3:5-15. Because of the length of the passage, may we suggest that the reader turn to his own Bible and read before continuing the lesson. Having read the text, we are now ready to learn the lessons that are open to us and observe some principles that govern God's guidance of man. We shall be able to discover what is and is not of real value in life.

Solomon was born into luxury, the son of a king. He lived the life of a prince, surrounded with all the glory, grandeur, riches, power, and influence that anyone could ever want in life. If ever such things were to be conducive to the building of a good character, they had opportunity in the unbringing of Solomon. So often those very circumstances provoke the development of a character that is “spoiled,” given to laziness and indulgence. It does not necessarily have to be that way, but often is. Those who are born into the luxurious way of life seldom ever have to face the struggles of existence that are so commonplace for the common man. They do not have to submit to self-denial nor learn the hardships of poverty. This environment invites pride and self-gratification and extravagance. When President Carter asked a citizen what he could do as president to keep in touch with the common man, the man replied, “Push a cart in the super market, drive in a traffic jam, and eat at McDonald's.” Those who live so far above the rest of us with respect to the material affairs of life either never know, or soon forget, what most have to encounter in the normal routine of life. Solomon's childhood would not have allowed him to come to a knowledge of the life most had to live.

Solomon Takes Control

Solomon's assumption of David's throne was not an easy task. His brother, Adonijah, had attempted to take the throne before him when David was still on his death bed, but not yet dead. Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, with the assistance of the

prophet Nathan, urged David to have Solomon crowned king as David's successor. In speedy action, this was done and the attempt of Adonijah was thwarted.

Even so, there was other opposition to him becoming king. Solomon found an excuse to have Adonijah put to death, also the long-time captian of David's army, Joab, who with Abiathar turned against David after a life of friendship. Abiathar, a priest, was deposed. Shemei, who had been an ally with Absalom when Absalom tried to overturn David, was put to death. One by one, by the use of violence and removal from power, Solomon was able to rid his courts of all those who were not supporters or who were potential enemies. In time, the responsibility to rule the nation rested firmly and entirely with Solomon.

Our text tells of a request Solomon made for wisdom so he would know how to rule Israel. It is generally ascribed to Solomon great credit for making the kind of request that he made. But actually, upon examination of the text more closely, we see how God taught Solomon through the dream that for which Solomon must ask. To the credit of Solomon, he obeyed that which God taught him in the matter.

It Was A Dream

Notice that the text is the record of a dream. *"And in Gibeon the Lord appeared unto Solomon in a dream by night...And Solomon awoke and behold, it was a dream."* (Verses 5, 15). God communicated with him by this dream. This was a means of instruction that God used many times in former days. He taught Moses, Daniel, Joseph, Nebuchadnezzar, Jacob, many others in this fashion. *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son..."* (Hebrews 1:1,2). This dream was revelation to Solomon of what he ought to seek as king and what he should strive to be.

What did God teach him? Solomon was assuming great responsibilities and powers. He should show honor and respect for his illustrious father, David. While many today think it is wisdom to discard the past, God taught Solomon he should walk as his father had done. Solomon was fortunate to have had, for the most part, the great example of a good and great leader before him.

Notice also that Solomon was taught humility. God taught

him to say, *"I am but a little child."* (verse 7). A child is in need of guidance. He is not self-sufficient, but dependent upon that which is greater than he. This teaching was prefaced with Solomon in the dream calling himself a *"servant."* For a man of high estate to call himself a servant is a mark of humility. Power, when coupled with pride, is a very dangerous weapon against the people over which such a one holds the power. God taught him to have respect for his own position and for those he led.

In the dream the people of Israel were called *"a great people."* When a leader does not consider those he leads to be worthy, he will mistreat them. This often happens in the home and the church, as well as in civil matters of earthly governments. But when a leader does respect those he leads he will exercise great caution and be as responsible as possible in handling all matters that concern his subjects.

Give God The Credit

Credit was given to God for having made Solomon king. *"Thou hast made thy servant king."* (verse 7). How many times, after one has come to power, even though he might have called upon God while seeking power, after receiving it, he forgets God and considers he has attained his power by himself. Some have little or no consideration for those who placed them in power and made it possible for them to achieve. Those who assist along the way are so soon forgotten. God, as much as anyone else, is left out once the goal is reached.

Solomon was also taught to ask for understanding of heart. He wanted wisdom to be able to rule correctly and discreetly. He needed to be able to discern between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error. This request, as Solomon was taught to make, was as much for Solomon's personal benefit as those whom he ruled. The pressures of governing, making decisions, handling aright national duties and complex situations, would be taxing on any man who assumes such duty. Should he not execute his judgment well, the problems for himself and the people would be multiplied.

Solomon learned the lesson that God taught him in that dream. He was to be blessed with not only that for which he asked, but with many other blessings for which he could have asked, but did not. He was given wisdom and understanding that excelled that of all others. He could have requested wealth, long life, power over his enemies, honor, on and on, the things

of this world for which people have even sold their souls to obtain. But Solomon was taught and learned well, and obeyed what he was taught, respecting the instruction of God. He sought the more important things in this life. And in addition, because he made the request the way he did, he was given so many of the lesser benefits as well.

Wisdom Demonstrated

The wisdom of Solomon is seen in that dramatic episode before his throne recorded in First Kings 3:16-28. Again, because of the length of the passage, we ask that the reader take his Bible and read that account just now. Each time it is read, we come away amazed at the wisdom demonstrated by Solomon.

Solomon's fame as a wise man spread throughout the world. *"And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Dardo, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five."* (First Kings 4:29-32). *"And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."* (First Kings 4:34).

The Queen of Sheba visited Solomon and her reaction must have been typical to that of most visitors. *"And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and behold, the half was not told me. Thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom."* (First Kings 10:6-8).

We are also expected to be wise. *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."* (Ephesians 5:15-17). The wisdom we seek is to be true wisdom. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."* (Proverbs 9:20). There is no such thing as true wisdom without respect for God. This is why I

wonder so often why anybody would point to someone who denied the very existence of God as being some kind of “scholar” in the realm of religious matters. His knowledge does not include respect for God. He is unwise.

“Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.” (First Corinthians 3:18-20). Worldly wisdom has deceived some men into thinking they are wise by discarding God. They show themselves to be fools in so doing. To be wise, one might well have to be considered a fool in the eyes of the worldly-wise.

The Source of Wisdom

God is the source of true wisdom. *“For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”* (Proverbs 2:6). *“If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.”* (James 1:5). The “asking” is not expressing the manner by which we seek wisdom, but rather the idea is that wisdom is that for which we ought to seek, and God is the source of it. We need wisdom that is from above. *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”* (James 3:17). This wisdom comes by and through the revealed Word of God. *“All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God...”* (Second Timothy 3:15). *“Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* (First Corinthians 2:6-8).

Inseparable

Take note that Solomon’s wisdom was conditioned upon his obedience to the Word of God. First Kings 3:14, *“If thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments...”* Obedience and wisdom are inseparable.

In our day, there is a great premium placed upon formal education, and justly so. People are made wise in many useful areas through educational efforts. Many are made wise in areas that are eternally useless. But without education, we would be less advantaged to be sure, but “The only really educated person is the one who has been educated first as a Christian.” A knowledge and proper use of everything else without the knowledge and wisdom derived from the Word of God prevents one from being truly wise.

Jesus taught that the wise man builds his house on the rock while the foolish man builds on sand. Only by following the Christ of heaven can one be wise. Being a Christian will mean that your wisdom is of eternal value, even exceeding the wisdom that characterized that great king of Israel so many years ago.

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How Do I Know When I Am Right?

In the first half of the 1800's, there was an American statesman named Henry Clay who desired very much to be president of the nation. But Clay was a man of strong convictions and somewhat of an uncompromising nature in many areas. It is credited to him to have once said that he would rather be right than president.

Solomon once wrote, “*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death.*” (Proverbs 14:12). Being right is valuable and desirable. In many areas of activity, being wrong is fatal. Being wrong simply means to be in error and to fail to have the truth. Being right is essential to succeed in business, to reach correct destinations in travel, in construction of buildings, and certainly in the field of medicine. Being wrong can mean bankruptcy, wrong destinations, and life or death situations. Surely, we should strive to be right, and this takes effort. In fact, if the whole truth was known, the fact that it takes effort to be right is a major contributing factor as to why so many are so wrong so much of the time when they could be right.

We Must Be Right

But there is no area of human involvement where being right is more important than in the realm of religion. If we are wrong in secular matters, even the most serious consequences are temporary in nature. But being wrong in matters of the spirit are of eternal significance. In spite of the fact that much of our present age seems to place a stigma on being right and wanting to be right, branding being right to be equivalent to bigotry, self-righteousness, and other uncomplimentary descriptions, it does make a difference what one believes and what one does in the matter of religion. This mania that "I'm O.K., you're O.K." has just about made people think that nothing matters. "Everything is beautiful in its own way" has been the distorted thinking of too many for too long until many actually believe that whatever one believes and whatever one does, it must be acceptable to everybody, including God. Is it not true that any philosophical thought that contradicts itself is unworthy of being accepted? Well, is it not true that it is foolishness to contend that there is no right, there is no wrong, that everything is relative and nothing is absolute? How can those who claim everything is relative be so absolutely sure about their contention? How can those who insist nobody can really know what is right and wrong be so confident that they are right when they make their assertion? They meet themselves coming back and contradict their own stance. In every matter of life people know that it makes a difference what you think and what you do. But somehow, some mixed-up people wish to exclude religion from that reality. The Scriptures teach that there is a right and a wrong, and that people can know which is which.

Motives Matter

Seeing the benefit in being right, we must guard ourselves from having an evil motive for wanting to be right. We should want to be right because we love the truth, want the truth, and despise error. We should not want to be right just to prove somebody else wrong, or to present some show of personal superiority, or to put someone down. We can study the Bible to learn but we can have a bad motive for even studying the Scriptures. We should be more concerned with **what** is right and less concerned with **who** is right. Remember, before God, the heart must be right in order to be right.

Let us also realize that death is certain (Hebrews 9:27), the judgment is inevitable (Second Corinthians 5:10), our duty in life is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13), and we shall not be prepared for what is coming nor fulfill our purpose in life unless we are right. It is not just as useful to be wrong as it is to be right.

People encounter hindrances that prevent them from being right in matters of religion. Often they are just downright prejudice against the truth. Very often they are ignorant of the truth, some even preferring the darkness rather than the light. There is the handicap of being self-willed, closed minded, actually loving sinful ways. At the root of nearly all of it is the application of false standards of measure by which to determine right from wrong. And how pride steps in so very often. Some, it seems, had rather die than ever admit they were wrong. But it takes a better person to admit being wrong when he is wrong than to persist in holding on to error in order to "save face."

The Standard

For one to be able to determine what is right and wrong, there must be that perfect standard of measure, and one must have knowledge of that standard in order to properly apply it. In matters of religion so many have heaped to themselves their human traditions, their creeds, manuals, prayer books, catechisms, disciplines, confessions, etc. Others follow their feelings as well as doctrines of men. But all these things are constantly changing, being altered, up-dated, and discarded. They are as fickle as can be. They are not reliable. What they say today may not be what they say tomorrow. They are made by men and are changed by men. They are of human authority, not divine authority.

The only standard by which to measure what is right and wrong in matters of the spirit, matters of religion, matters of the relationship between God and man, is God's Word, the Bible. *"But the word of God endureth forever."* (First Peter 1:25). *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (Second Peter 1:20,21). Paul contended that his message came not from man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). *"But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth*

all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of 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 2:10-13). *“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).

The Bible is adequate, so much so that nothing is needed or allowed. Nothing about it is to be omitted, altered, or added to it. Let me insist right here that here is the doctrinal danger of the so-called “modern versions” of the Bible, produced by unbelievers, who are bent on promoting modernism and denominationalism, and are guilty of rewriting the Scriptures, adding to and taking from, changing and distorting what God has said, offering their commentaries as if that was the Word of God. It is my conviction, and for good reason, that the most serious danger facing the Lord’s people today in maintaining faithfulness to the Word of God is the general acceptance of the modern versions. This is true not only because of the fatal doctrinal error within them, but also because it reveals a careless and unconcerned attitude on the part of so-called Christians regarding the veracity and verbal inspiration of the Bible. The acceptance of modern versions is another symptom of the willingness to compromise God’s truth in order to accept the doctrines of men. The only reliable standard is the Word of God, reliably translated. The Bible is the inerrant, inspired, infallible, verbally and plenary inspired, authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God. That is the measure that must be used to determine what is right and to distinguish it from what is wrong. *There is no other.*

Matter of Understanding

“But everybody understands the Bible differently,” cried someone who really does not seem to be aware of the seriousness of his comment, and who is trying to find some justification for believing whatever you want and doing whatever

you like. Remember, God gave us the Bible. In that Bible He calls for unity. Is God guilty of demanding unity but also guilty of giving us a guide that makes unity impossible? What a charge to make against God! God gave the Bible to be understood and mankind can either understand it or God demands something and makes it impossible at the same time. When two people differ over something in the Bible, it is not God's fault. One or both misunderstand what God has taught. When they both understand it, they will see it alike. It is not that people cannot see the Bible alike. The trouble is, too many prefer to look at it through glasses colored with their denominational prejudices and human creeds. Just why would God command us to study His Word (Second Timothy 2:15) if we cannot understand it anyway?

Too many people decide what they are going to believe on the basis of WHO BELIEVES IT rather than WHAT SCRIPTURE TEACHES. They follow theologians, philosophers, clergymen, "scholars," ancestors, you name it, they follow it.

How can I know when I stand in truth? First, guard your heart and pursue the truth with an honest and sincere motive. Second, compare your convictions with that which the Bible teaches. Do not ever be caught up in that nonsense so prevalent in today's world, "This can't be wrong because it feels so right." That is an absolutely stupid measure.

Put It To The Test

Let us run a few tests by considering a few issues. What about the origin of the world. Did all things just happen into existence? Is evolution true? Was the world created? Is it all an ancient accident by chance? Is there any plan to it? Read Genesis 1:1 and learn that God created the heaven and the earth, and as we continue to read we learn the origin of all things.

What about the identity of Jesus? Was He merely a teacher, or a martyr for a cause that faltered? Was He a zealot, a fraud, or the Son of God? Can the reading of Scripture leave any doubt as to the teaching that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

Ask about the reality of heaven and hell, and read Matthew 25:46 that speaks of eternal life and everlasting or eternal punishment. What name should the followers of Christ wear? Let Acts 11:26 inform you that the disciples were called Christians. Does not that settle the matter?

How many churches did Christ build? Ephesians 4:4 says there is one body and Ephesians 1:22,23 tells us the body is the church. Does not that answer the question? Did Christ say, "Upon this rock I will build my churches?" Or did He say "church" in the singular number? The Bible teaches us about one church, His church, and no other church.

What kind of music is to be used in worship under the authority given by Christ? Every time the Scripture speaks of the subject it says, "Sing." Shall we abide by what the Word teaches, or do we presumptuously take the liberty to our damnation and add to His Word and do whatever we want?

What about denominationalism? Well, what about it? Nothing in the Bible authorizes its existence. It is the result of human error. Why cannot we simply recognize that reality and abide by it? Division is condemned, not condoned (First Corinthians 1:10).

On it goes with subject after subject. What is the way to raise money, the way to be saved, the organization of the church, the work of the church, the manner of life acceptable to God, attitudes and actions toward others, marriage, divorce, remarriage, worship, miracles, the role of women, duty to civil government, morality, ethics, the Lord's Supper, adultery, whatever. The Scripture provides us God's teaching. The truth shall make us free (John 8:32). We can know the truth, follow the truth, and be right.

It Really Matters

It matters what you believe and what you do. Just being honest and sincere in your convictions is not sufficient. This you must be, but you also must be right. As we feed on the Word of God we can know what God has declared to be right. Whatever is at variance from that is wrong. This is either true, or the Bible is of no value whatever.

Buy the truth and sell it not," was Solomon's advice. (Proverbs 23:23). "*Cease from thine own wisdom,*" is found in Proverbs 23:4. When you follow God's Word you will be right and can know you are right.

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It's Over For A While

The big presidential election is past, and I am pleased with the way it went. Let me tell you why.

While I am sure many voted because of economics, foreign policy, and other mundane issues, there were others issues that far outweighed these things, such as morality, human dignity, and faith in God.

I do not think I could ever bring myself to cast any influence in favor of one who admittedly endorsed Humanism, or was in favor of granting people the right to kill unborn children through abortion. Furthermore, the shrill, defiant demand to consider homosexuality as an acceptable and alternative life style is more than anyone who believes the Bible can tolerate. There was such a distinct choice on these issues that, to my mind, should have been of paramount concern to every person who believes in God, and certainly to those who profess to be New Testament Christians.

Neither candidate nor party could claim perfection this time as in other times. In these elections, we, as citizens of God's kingdom first and citizens of our nation second, must consider the trend of influence as well as specifics regarding morality and righteousness in the land. Such qualities are the backbone of any nation that wishes to remain free and blessed. Those considerations are far more important than party, money, or anything else.

I can explain the way I voted because of my moral and religious convictions. It does disturb me that so many Americans evidently did not care about these weightier matters and gave their support to that which is so antagonistic to the truths of the Bible. I even noticed a few who say they belong to the Lord's church giving their endorsement to political figures who are openly rebellious to the basic fundamental principles of human dignity and morality. It makes me wonder how much the teaching of the Bible really matters to them.

I know the government is not the way we must promote the kingdom of God. But I also know that I had rather have those who regulate the government be sympathetic to my convictions rather than have those who are openly destructive of them to decide the affairs of our government. JWB

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Do You Know Why?

When an old and faithful dog grows old, blind, and crippled, we might take him to the "vet" and have him "put to sleep." But we would not that to our elderly people who may be in similar conditions. Do you know why?

When a horse breaks a leg it has been the usual procedure to shoot him. But we do not shoot people who might break a leg. Do you know why there is a difference?

Thousands of cattle are slaughtered each day for food for other creatures. Such a thought as doing this to humans is so repulsive we do not entertain it for a moment. Do you know why?

Some claim we are only evolved animals. If they are right, where is the logical and consistent reason for treating humans differently from other animals? Even evolutionists do not like the logical conclusions of their theory. It is but a theory; an anti-God and anti-human theory.

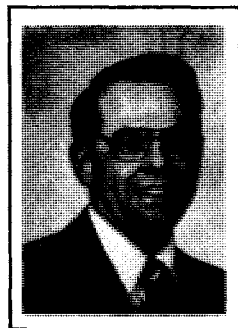
"Let us make man in our image..." is the reason humans are different. If you remove God, as atheists, evolutionists, and humanists contend, man becomes nothing more than a totally materialistic animal. I contend we had better watch out for such people before they kill us all.

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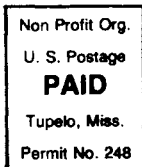
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If You Wish To Continue...

(See enclosure)

Index For This Issue On Back Cover

What About Modern “Faith” Healing?

There is as much concern about the matter of “faith” healing as there is about almost any religious question being considered today. There are many people who sincerely believe that Christ heals miraculously today through men as was done in the first century. There was a time when only the very emotional and ignorant would be deceived regarding this, but today there is an unbelievable number of otherwise intelligent people who think this miraculous healing takes place now. There are many religious sects that preach such an event, such as the Holiness people, Spiritualists, Roman Catholics, Christian Scientists, Pentecostals, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc. Some Methodists and Baptists are heard to claim miracles now and then.

When one begins to examine the claims and doctrines he is soon impressed with the lack of uniformity in the teaching and reported events. Strangely, even though they all claim their work is of God and that the Holy Spirit is operating in this direct manner through miraculous healing, they disown each other and claim the others are false religionists regarding doctrines. In fact, they each claim the other to be fakes as often as not.

Those who believe in “faith” healing contend that it was the mission of Jesus to redeem the body as well as the soul. The idea is, “Through the fall of Adam we lost everything. Jesus recovered all through His atonement.” There is the attempt to show spiritual salvation and physical healing to be inseparable. Where one goes, go both. Healing is physical salvation; forgiveness is spiritual salvation. Every Christian is supposed to be redeemed both physically and spiritually.

No Exemption

Somehow they forget that the Christian is not promised exemption from physical affliction. The presence of death ought be sufficient to show that the child of God is not exempt from physical woes. Even the faith healers get sick and die. Grief, toil, pain, deprivation, tears, fear, all these things common to man are often suffered by the Christian as well. Even one of Paul’s

fellow workers was sick (Second Timothy 4:20). While we are promised grace to endure, we are not promised freedom from hardship and suffering. Just consider how much physical distress the apostles suffered. Peter once wrote, *“If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed...”* and this proves that even Christians suffer. They are spiritually redeemed but they suffer the pains of the body like other men.

We also need to observe how the healing ministry of Christ differs from that conducted by the modern miracle claimants. Never did Christ do what he did for notoriety. He had a higher and holier mission. He healed all manner of diseases, even extreme cases. Nor was there ever any indication that He came to deliver every follower from disease. Not all were healed even when He healed some. Salvation from sin and healing of the body were not set up as inseparable. There were no partial recoveries, no failures to heal, no continuation of symptoms and pain, and He never told anyone to wait a while and eventually their “healing” would be evident. His healings were instantaneous, and a “go home, pray, wait, it will come” type of deception. His mission was to *“seek and save the lost.”* He came into the world to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). His gospel was not a “health and wealth salvation.”

Sin and Sickness

Modern faith healers sometimes preach that physical illness is due to sin. Yes, through Adam many hardships came into the world. But one can be sick, and even die, but not because of some sin he has committed. Thinking that physical distress is due to some spiritual transgression, they claim that to be physically healed the spiritual condition must first be corrected. This gives the “healer” an alibi when the “healing” does not occur. It is the fault of the one who is sick, not the “healer.” The sick lacked “faith,” he is told.

Personal sins can cause illness, but such is not always the case. In John 9:1-3, there was a man who was blind, but Jesus said it was not because of his sins nor the sins of his parents. Job suffered through no fault of his own. Ahaziah was sick (First Kings 1), but it was because he fell through a lattice from his upper chamber. Falling down is no sin against God.

Role of Faith

With the “modern faith healers,” personal faith is essential to physical healing. Without faith, no one can be healed. As noted earlier, this provides the escape of responsibility from the “fake” healer when healing does not occur. Furthermore, the subject is groomed, prepared, programmed, and told what to say and do and to contend he is healed regardless of what happens because to doubt it would mean his faith was lacking and he could not be healed. This is the reason many “testify” that they have been healed when they have not. Some have later died, having ceased to take necessary medicine. Some continue with every symptom but insist they are healed.

Of the thirty-one recorded healings by Christ, faith on the part of the one healed was required in only one. Faith was present in seven others, but not a condition for healing. Five were healed on the basis of the faith of others. In nine cases, there is no evidence of faith. In four, faith is most unlikely. In four others, faith was impossible. Yet, our 20th century “miracle man” demands personal faith in the sick.

Some faith healers are opposed to all medical care altogether. This is true of all of them. It is interesting to note that during the Oral Roberts Crusade of Healing, on one occasion the tent fell, many were hurt, and they were sent to the hospital. Many wondered why Oral did not take care of the matter. Strange, also, that in his later years, he now builds a hospital to utilize medical science. If he could heal, why build a hospital?

Two Kinds of Healing

There are two kinds of healing. One is natural; the other was miraculous. Some faith healers tell us, “When a Christian does not trust God for the healing of his body, but runs to drugs and medicines, he is resorting to the same experiments as does the drunkard, harlot, and thief.” That is an extreme position, but some contend that way. To them, the use of medicine is a repudiation of God. They will even allow their own children to die before they would give them medicine, or allow an operation by a doctor.

Progress in medical science is undeniable. Its benefits are beyond refutation. Godly men use medicines. In the Bible, godly men used medicines. Even Christ commended the sick to physicians. Luke was a physician. The Good Samaritan was commended for using means to help the wounds of the troubled man he assisted. Paul told Timothy to take “*a little wine for the*

stomach's sake." Opposition to medicine is a refusal to use what God has already given and placed here on earth. Some had rather God did something miraculous than to use what God has already provided.

Evidence Is Lacking

Stories innumerable have been told of "wonderful healings," but when these things are checked out, they are far from being what they are claimed to be. It has been my experience that those who claim such events always know of someone somewhere, way off from nowhere, that had heard of something that happened. I have confronted many who have claimed healing by miracles and have yet to find one that can prove his claim. They expect you to simply accept it on the basis of their "testimony."

The truth is, the days of miracles are past. First Corinthians 13 is Paul's discussion of spiritual and miraculous gifts and he made it clear that they would fail, cease, vanish away, be done away. He told when that would be; "*when that which is perfect is come.*" This refers to the "*perfect law of liberty.*" (James 1:25). This refers to that which for a time was partially revealed but is now fully revealed. These gifts were to remain "*Till we all attain to the unity of the faith.*" (Ephesians 4:13). This is not until we all believe alike, as modern perversions of the Bible state, but until "the faith" is fully revealed. For a time God's will was embodied in inspired men who could and would confirm their teaching by working the miraculous. But now His will is embodied in the inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It has been confirmed (Hebrews 2:3,4), and needs no additional confirmation. To claim the need for repeated confirmation is to doubt the record itself. Miracles were for confirming the Word (Mark 16:20). We have that perfect law of liberty and there is neither the need nor the use of the miraculous anymore.

Decline of Miraculous Gifts

It is interesting to note the decline of the mentioning of spiritual gifts as the New Testament was being written and came more and more toward completion.

The problem with "faith healers" and those who believe there are miracles today is their problem of simply not believing the revealed will of God. They do not wish to walk by faith, but by

sight. Unless God keeps on doing something special for them, they cannot accept what He has said. They demand God work a miracle. One set of parents said that they prayed to God that their child might be healed, and "God was honor bound to keep His word." The child eventually got better because the medicine worked.

What Really Happens?

Well, how does one explain the apparent recoveries at the healing campaigns? Healings do occur, but they are not miracles. Keep in mind that all healing is divine healing in that God is involved. But God heals through natural means and not miraculous means today. Many illnesses are psychosomatic and can be healed through the proper utilization of psychological means. Faith healers never have accomplished anything that medical science has not done. We must realize that there are three kinds of illness. One kind is organic. Some organ or structural part of the body has been diseased or afflicted such as a broken bone or a ruptured blood vessel. Then there are functional diseases of mental or nervous disorders as hysteria or anxiety which can cause physical symptoms. There are also combinations of the two as when one suffers a fall and injures his spine. Organically he recovers but there is a functional or mental block that prevents him from walking. Paralysis is set aside when that mental problem is corrected. The paralysis was caused purely from the mind even though the physical injury had recovered.

Faith healers never cure the organic problems of broken bones or diseased organs. They can assist in these functional disorders through the combination of the power of suggestion and emotional tensions and stresses, which often borders on near hypnotism. It is psychotherapy. Doctors, psychologists, and even parents do the same thing over and over. There is no miracle involved. A miracle is a direct intervention on the part of God, setting aside the natural means and using the supernatural. These corrections are not supernatural, but according to natural physical and psychological laws that men have studied and learned.

Doctors tell us that probably two-thirds of all illnesses are of mental origin. This is the reason some doctors on occasion prescribe pseudo pills such as sugar pills. They simply recognize the mental or emotional factors involved in healing when there is

no organic difficulty causing the symptoms.

The mind has a great influence over the body. Under certain emotional conditions, ills can be cured by the process of suggestion by planting the idea of healing in the mind. But this is a natural process not miraculous.

Deception and Fraud

So much can be said about modern faith healers that space prohibits saying much more. But the popular and renowned "faith healers" are frauds and deceivers getting rich over the naive and gullible people who grasp at anything in the hope that they can recover. Illnesses remain, symptoms continue, money is collected. People are told they are healed when they are not. I recall talking to a woman who Oral Roberts was supposed to have healed from affliction of stuttering. She said he told her it would take a few days. Such fraudulent practice is a sin against God and man. The candidates are screened and their alleged illnesses are fake or misdiagnosed. They always have some problem impossible to verify at the healing campaign like heart problems, nervousness, kidney stones.

The dangers of this malicious rake-off are at least two-fold. Some have neglected proper treatment suffer the results because they believe they are healed. Just recently a faith-healed person "cured" of tuberculosis was confined because she had carried the disease to many others while she believed she had been "healed" by the Lord miraculously. The other danger is seen in how people will give heed to the lying doctrines these "fakes" perpetrate. Thereby they are immunized against the truth and go on to perdition, feeling quite secure. Why do people believe them? Many reasons can be offered, but primarily it is because they know not the truth of the Bible regarding the miraculous.

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(continued from page 17)

Modernism, Romanism, radicalism, worldliness are but a few of the discernible trends and drifts that are evident in the church today. They have become battlegrounds within and without the church because those that love truth and are determined to stand for it will not let such pass as if it was nothing.

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The Sin Of Grumbling

Many have a tendency to classify sins as big sins or little sins. Sometimes this classification is determined by what I do that is wrong in contrast to what you do that is wrong. Your sins are big and mine are usually little. But we also think that one who steals five dollars has committed a little sin while a person that steals a million has sinned a big sin. We classify lying in terms of white lies and black lies. We all seem to recognize adultery, idolatry, murder, and such as that to be sinful, yes, very sinful. Such sins contributed to the downfall of Israel and Judah. But we also must notice that murmuring, complaining and grumbling were listed along with these other sins. The sin of grumbling was one of the reasons so many Israelites fell in the wilderness. This being true, why should we conclude that murmuring and complaining are less displeasing to God?

“Moreover brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.” (First Corinthians 10:1-10).

Commonly Committed

“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23). All men have sinned, but not all have sinned the same way. Some are guilty of murder, others of drunkenness or lying, or something else. But very likely many, if not most, have been guilty of murmuring, complaining, and

grumbling. So we have under consideration that which is not foreign to us.

Actually, grumbling is one of the most useless activities in which we could engage. It is about as beneficial as the man in the story about building the great Hoover Dam (once named Boulder Dam) in Arizona. It was my privilege to see that huge structure some years ago and it is massive. It blocks the very swift and powerful Colorado River that cuts its way through the Grand Canyon. The benefits of that dam are immeasurable regarding flood control, irrigation, energy and other benefits. But what would you think of a man who, at the very beginning of the building of that dam, came forward and said he would build it, and simply began tossing stones over the canyon wall into the river? We need not go on with the uselessness of such an effort. We would suggest, however, that the exercise of grumbling is about as beneficial, and even harmful.

It Is Useless

Just what can be accomplished by grumbling? We evidently must think there is some usefulness in it because so many of us do so much of it. But does it really ease any pain? Has it ever changed the weather? How many church problems has it solved? It has caused quite a few. Does it produce a better person? Has it caused food to taste any better? How many have been made healthier, wealthier or wiser? Did it ever produce a friend? It has alienated many friends from each other. It never improves the disposition. In fact, it really does not bring satisfaction and contentment even to the grumbler. It probably has never produced any good without creating worse side effects. It just is not one of the recommended manners of conduct. is it?

One of the finest characteristics one can develop in life is that of contentment. Please do not confuse contentment with self-satisfaction, indifference or laziness. Paul wrote, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*" (First Timothy 6:6). "*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Hebrews 13:5).

It Is Revealing

Grumbling reveals something ugly about the grumbler. It

reveals an attitude of heart that is not becoming to a child of God. "*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*" (Matthew 12:34). When we grumble and complain we show what is in our hearts. "When something is always wrong, from the end back to the start, and you complain, in sunshine or rain, the something wrong is the heart."

The Christian has less reason to complain than anyone on earth. This is not to say that being a Christian is like living in a "bed of roses." That is not the case at all. But the mature Christian has learned to live with contentment. He enjoys the spiritual and physical blessings from God. He knows where he came from, why he is here, how to live while here, and where he is going. He is secure so long as he remains faithful in Christ. He does not fear what man can do to him. He has been cleansed from that which can destroy body and soul. He considers his life as an existence of preparation for the grand and glorious eternity with God. He does not give such emphasis to the affairs of this life and this world that he allows them to destroy and disrupt his peace with God.

It Is Injurious

Actually, we do injury to the cause of Christ to be a grumbler and complainer. We set such a bad example before others, even our children, that they conclude, even if not expressed out loud, "We want none of that way of life. It that is what being a Christian does to you, who needs it?" This sin hurts the church, the grumbler, everyone around the grumbler.

If there is something that is out-of-line, deal with it. Do something about it constructively. But to just keep up a barage of complaints is not the Christlike way to behave.

The Israelites were known for their much complaining. When they left Egypt, bound in by the Red Sea, mountains, and Pharoah's army, they began to complain, "Why did you bring us out here to die?" But God delivered them, did He not?

Once they were in safety on the other side of the sea they began to complain about the lack of food and water, as if God was not aware of their needs or did not concern Himself with them. They murmured, "We could have stayed back in Egypt and done better than this. We had rather died there than come over here and be killed by giants. We don't like this and we object to that."

On and on it went, year after year. I do not see how Moses

fared as well as he did with that mouthing, griping, vexing horde of wanderers. Each time God did something on their behalf and they would calm down, but would soon forget God's goodness and mercy and soon were heard complaining and murmuring and grumbling about something else.

It Brings Sorrow

Grumbling only brought sorrow to the Israelites. Has it ever produced much else? Has it produced happiness? Once fiery serpents were sent into their midst and those that were bitten died. Their complaining against God's instructions to enter Canaan, their failure to listen to the words of faith and courage from Joshua and Caleb and Moses caused them to wander in the wilderness those forty years. Their complaints never relieved them of any difficult, but only brought them into displeasure with God because of their gross ingratitude. Paul noted that it was a contributing factor to the downfall of many of them. Are we somehow immune from the dire consequences of similar activities?

It Is Offensive

When we grumble and complain it is offensive to God because we are complaining against His provisions for us. Moses told Israel, *"This shall be, when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for the Lord that heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him, and what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord."* (Exodus 16:8). God guides our lives and has promised us His providence if we seek Him, His kingdom, and His righteousness first in our lives (Matthew 6:34). Has he not promised us His protection and care? Is it because we doubt the Word of God that we lift our voices in complaint? Is it our lack of faith that we murmur when anything gets somewhat off balance? Has He not promised that we will not be tempted above what we can bear, what we can overcome, what He provides in the way of escape (First Corinthians 10:13)? *"Do all things without murmuring and disputing."* (Philippians 2:14). To murmur is closely akin to rebellion against God and a questioning of His wisdom. How unhappy are those who find fault with everything, everybody, anytime, everytime, regardless of who, what, when, where, or why! They are miserable and seem to be discontent

unless they can make everyone around them the same way.

There is another side of life if we would but open our eyes to see it. Alongside the bitter there is the sweet. There is the bad, but it is offset by the good that abounds. Only in heaven will everything be perfectly good. This is one additional reason that heaven is so appealing to mankind.

We have so many blessings for which to be thankful. Israel forgot their blessings, and we often are found walking in their ungrateful footsteps.

There Is A Remedy

The best and sure cure for grumbling is to heed the admonition of the song that says, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings, see what God has done." Someone said that he complained he had no shoes until he met the man who had no feet.

"The grumbler's life is ever so sad,
It is filled with sorrows and woes,
He hasn't thought how content he could be,
By counting the blessings God bestows."

We make our lot in life heavier and our lives harder by grumbling about matters over which we have no control. If there is something we can do about a matter, we do better to busy ourselves in doing it rather than simply complaining about it. If there is nothing we can do about it, is grumbling going to help?

✓ The great blessing that we who are God's children have is the forgiveness of sins. We do not have to live life in fear of death, in dread of the judgment. We belong to Christ and those faithful in Christ have every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). We are recipients of the benefits of God's grace because we have come to the One who brought grace and truth into the world (John 1:17). Believing God to be faithful to His Word, what reason do we have to spend our lives and mar our happiness with grumbling, murmuring, and complaining? Seeing what God has done for us, we ought be ashamed of ourselves to the extent that we will lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving rather than with grumbles and murmurs.

† † † † †

Trends And Battlegrounds

A religious movement broke out in America around the turn of the nineteenth century that is often called the Restoration Movement. It consisted of many people, encouraged by religious leaders, preachers, teachers, from various parts of the country, that noted the division that existed in the denominational world and realized that it was not the unity for which the New Testament called. They sent forth the plea for unity based upon the Word of God as the measuring standard. They urged people to abandon their human creeds and traditions and "speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent." They wanted no additional denominations, but only the restoration of the church of which we read in Scripture.

As the influence of these people expanded, it was inevitable that they would soon encounter each other, see some differences still existing, and continue to *search the scriptures* to learn what was true. Like in the days of the first century after Pentecost, the church came into reality where it not been known, and it grew and multiplied.

What Were The Goals?

The aims of those who were a part of this effort differed somewhat from that which was attempted by Martin Luther and other great leaders of the Protestant Reformation Movement. Those efforts were attempts to "reform" the existing conditions of the Roman Catholic Church. What resulted was the maze and confusion of Protestant denominationalism, with the establishment of many rival religious bodies, each teaching things distinctive to itself that separated it from others. The people of the Restoration Movement sought the abolition of sectarianism, human creeds, human doctrines and practices. They sought for all people to return to the Bible for the authority for what was believed and practiced. They said we should call Bible things by Bible names, do Bible things Bible ways, uphold only what the Bible taught, restore the faith as authored and revealed in the all-sufficient Bible. Whereas the leaders of the Reformation Movement sought reformation, those of the Restoration Movement sought to restore New Testament Christianity, nothing more or less.

Being a part of some “movement” is not our goal even today, but to restore the New Testament church remains the goal. We respect those who have gone before us with these noble and Biblical motives, but even the early restorers are not to be cited as our authority for anything. We are to follow no man as if he was the authority. A matter is true because God teaches it in His book, not because some nobleman of the past also believed and practiced such things.

Many found then and many find now that it is difficult to leave the shackles of denominationalism. They had become accustomed to human doctrines and creeds and fearfully contemplated leaving such things to follow just the Bible. But as they learned, they adopted certain things formerly ignored, and dropped certain unscriptural ideas they formerly held. Their attitude toward the Bible was right and remains right. We must retain that attitude, adhering to the Bible, never leaving it as our guide (First Peter 4:11; Second Timothy 3:16,17).

The Battle Was Fought

Those of the past warred a militant warfare. They had to fight, debate, struggle, endure hardship, win each inch of ground with difficulty and often suffered personal abuse. There are some novices today who glibly declare that nobody can win and nothing is accomplished by debates and militant presentations of the truth. But they have either never known or have wilfully forgotten the history of the early restoration efforts. Contrasting truth with error has always been an appropriate method for teaching the truth. It was in Bible times, it was in the early days of the work of restoration, and it is now. To be sure, some ill-advised and improperly conducted debates have done harm. But the abuse of a thing does not negate the proper use of it. As Jack Meyer said, “They laid it on the line. They let people see the difference. They were not afraid to contrast the gospel with human creeds, and to let men see that they were preaching the one and only way to heaven.” They left no one guessing and wondering what they meant as some do today when they speak with double-tongues and uncertain sounds. We have no reason to think that such militancy is out of date. We need to absorb their noble spirit and vigorously do battle, pressing for the truth, sacrificing ourselves with boldness, “*having done all to stand,*” as was done in days gone by. Without it, the movement lags and drifts and souls are endangered.

Drift From Distinctiveness

There is a treacherous drift away from both the principle and spirit of the earlier restoration efforts which were in many ways like the days of the early church. There is a growing reluctance on the part of some to make it clear that the church of Christ is the church of Christ, and that we are to be different for the sake of truth. You can listen to some “preach” and never come to a knowledge of the basic elements of the faith, never see any real difference between truth and error, never be shown the difference between the Lord’s church and denominations, even seldom treated to what one must do to be saved. The sweet nothings that pour from the sugar-coated orators only sounds out what people want to hear rather than what they need to hear, the gospel of Christ. It is evident that some preachers must determine successful preaching by how many laughs they get per minute. Even among some in the church there is a growing antagonism against exposing error and contrasting it with truth.

Because of this reluctance and fear the brotherhood is losing its distinctiveness. We are not unmindful of the intention of some to reduce the church into just another denomination. With the attitude of leaving everybody else alone, being complacent and indifferent, fearful of offending, becoming smug with increases in numbers and monetary resources, many have put out the “Do Not Disturb” sign, expecting everybody to heed it. With fine meetinghouses and community acceptance (which is the emphasis of many) some have judged themselves religiously successful. But the truth goes wanting for proclaimers and many are deceived into thinking all is well when it is not.

The Discipline Gap

Discipline in the church, as the Bible commands, has become a “no-no” with many “loving” brethren. They love others so much they will disobey God to let the sinner continue in his sinful way rather than do what God says regarding him. It is not popular to stand for the truth. Timidly, almost with apologies, if at all, the distinctive qualities of the faith are being heard. As you hear some who call themselves preachers of the gospel, you would come to the conclusion that doing what God says, even commands, is optional rather than mandatory. There is a deadly trend away from militancy, coupled with ambiguity. We are certainly not advocating brethren should go out looking for a

fight. But some fights are necessary and when you are doing God's will in this world some fights are inevitable if we are faithful. Progress, real progress, has always been made that way. Pseudo-growth is what we see so much of today with the "namby-pamby" compromises many promote and condone.

We have too long been "at ease" and have closed our eyes to the drifts and trends that now threaten the church as never before in our lifetime. This desire to relax, be at peace at whatever price, and be approved by others has about sunk the ship of faith and crashed it upon the rocks of digression and apostasy once again.

Covering Up The Message

There was a time, even when I was a young preacher, when members of the churches of Christ were known for their knowledge of the Bible. But we have become overburdened with the barage of "how-to-ism" that many have lost the "what" we are to teach. Too many depend on the preacher and do not study for themselves. What is proven to be worse, many have relied upon the college expert and "scholar" who often has acquired his status from studying at the feet of false teachers in the denominational seminaries. Some read but probably anemic literature, something "edited" by one of our brethren but saturated with denominational doctrines and ideas. Others have become enamoured with the "easy-to-read" modern versions without being too concerned what they teach. Bible study classes are ignored by nearly half of the members of the church. It is not likely that those who habitually and repeatedly absent themselves from Bible study are serious students of the Word at home. The result of all of this is telling and becoming more and more pronounced. Ignorance of the Word is producing a digressive body, more akin to that against which the restorers waged war, than like the church for which Christ shed His blood as revealed in the New Testament.

Modernism And Company

Let me briefly mention four areas of battle upon the church even as I write these lines. Probably the most threatening is modernism, liberalism, humanism, atheism. There is a militant denial of God, the Bible as His Word, the Deity of Christ, the need of His faith at all, the miracles of the Bible, the very

integrity and authority of the Scriptures. Problems facing the church in days gone by have caused great division in the church, but these doctrines are designed to totally and completely destroy and remove the church from the world, terminating its existence. What is so astounding is that modernism is pouring into the ranks of the church through the schools and professors who have gained their academic standings in the study of modernism and at the feet of modernists, and have come to the campuses operated by brethren, coming with the air of superiority and scholarly sophistication that nobody knows anything but them, and injecting what they have learned into the minds of inexperienced youth, to the chagrin of unsuspecting parents once it is known, sowing their evil work for generations because among those they teach are young men who plan to preach. When will the Lord's people become aware of the change that has come over the schools and the damage so many in the Bible departments are doing to the church? There is not one, not to my knowledge, and I have investigated, where there cannot be found false teachers, sounds of compromise, uncertain sounds, and often overt liberalism, modernism and agnosticism. It is taking a deadly toll in the church.

Romanism

In America the Roman Catholic Church is making its play for renewed dominance and influence by means of compromising many of its "infallible" positions that the public does not admire. What Romanism has lost in Europe it intends to recapture in America. Through deception and duplicity, it may call for religious tolerance and liberty, but does not officially change its doctrines along those lines, nor repent of its past expressed intentions. Romanism is a chameleon, being whatever it has to be at the moment, to gain power. In this respect it is not unlike atheistic communism. These two anti-Christ systems drink from the same kind of approaches of force, fear, persecution, subtlety and ignorance, especially of the Bible. Many, in their desire to show how "loving" they are have shied away from any exposure of Romanism, being blinded by certain "good works" that they do, even wishing Catholic leaders well in their pursuits. We ought to be ashamed to have any hesitancy to oppose and expose one of the most anti-Biblical religious systems on earth.

Radicalism

The church must battle radicalism, human legalism, the attempt of some to declare themselves as God's special spokesmen by claiming special revelations to them from God. They, as all false teachers, take some portions of the body of truth, mingle it with their own doctrines and "revelations," and deceive many who are gullible, misinformed, naive, and Biblically untaught.

There are even those in the church who would go beyond what is written by assigning certain laws, rules, regulations for which there is no Biblical authority, dividing churches over issues of cooperation and the support of needy people. Making laws where God has not made them, whether legalistic or liberalistic, is wrong. Man does not have the right to make laws where God has not given them, nor does man have the right to presumptuously take it upon himself to act without Biblical authority in matters religious. Both are contrary to truth.

Christians must be "anti" everything unauthorized of God. But we must not stand opposed to what is acceptable and Biblically substantiated. As hideous and sinful as such is, liberalism is far worse of the two problems of legalism and liberalism, because liberalism removes all basis for determining truth and error.

Worldliness

A massive problem of the church in our time is the compromise and fellowship of the sins of the world by so many who profess to be Christians. Members of the church are found doing just about anything and everything, going along even without sound and solid Biblical rebuke and discipline. Dancing, drinking alcohol, adultery, gambling, lying, cheating, smoking, and such like are all found openly practiced by far too many members of the church for it to be accidental.

Let a sound preacher raise his voice and declare God's denunciation of such things and it will likely not be long before he is forced to move his place of residence because the members will not tolerate denunciation of what they like to do. Elderships often do not want the truth taught on worldliness and members raise trouble if it is done. More and more preachers, knowing who "batters their bread" (and they want their bread buttered) are showing their cowardice by omitting these subjects from their sermons and skirting the matters altogether. They love their hire and fear their "fire."

(continued on page 6)

False Doctrines Of Jehovah's Witnesses

“Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.” (Psalm 199:104). We must love what God loves and hate what God hates. While we love people who hold to error, we hate the error to which they hold. Such is applicable to the religious group known as Jehovah's Witnesses.

This religious group was founded by Charles Taze Russell and for a time was known as “Russellites.” This man founded *Zion's Watchtower* in 1879. It is not unfair to say that he was a scoundrel and a fraud. He was taken into court many times because of his misdeeds, proven to be a liar, making false claims, guilty of forgery and fraudulent promotions. Jehovah's Witnesses do not like to refer to him because of the kind of man that he was. Although he was their founder, it is to their credit that they would rather disclaim him.

Russell was succeeded by one named “Judge” J. F. Rutherford, who was a tireless and brilliant man in many ways. He did serve a term in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary because of a violation of the Espionage Act in 1918. He has since died.

Since 1931

They adopted the name of “Jehovah's Witnesses” at Columbus, Ohio in 1931, leaving the name of Russell. The head of their body is the man who serves as the president of the *Watchtower*.

There is no question but the Jehovah's Witnesses are a very zealous, hard-working people in promoting their faith. They print literature in massive amounts. Their magazine is produced in 100 languages from their printing plant and school in Brooklyn, N. Y. They are very mission minded, preaching their message in at least 160 nations, going from house to house with their literature, constantly seeking converts. They have also gained notoriety through opposition to the laws of the United States regarding service in the armed forces, refusing to salute the flag, etc. They have been the object of much persecution throughout the world by the Roman Catholic Church. Huge mass meetings at the New York Yankee stadium has brought

them much publicity.

The primary source of their beliefs are the writings of Russell in seven volumes called *Studies in the Scriptures*. The importance they place on these writings is seen in their own comments regarding them. "They are not mere comments on the Bible, but they are practically the Bible itself. Furthermore, not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see also, that if anyone lays the 'Scripture Studies' aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them, after he has read them for ten years, if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the 'Scripture Studies' with their references and had not read a page of the Bible as such, he would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures." [*Watchtower*, September 15, 1910, p. 298].

From God or Man?

Is the religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses from God or from man? They claim they teach the Bible and claim to be Christians through their latter-day revelation. Since they make this claim, they are of concern to those who claim to teach the Bible and be Christians but differ with them. Their doctrines can be proven false by an examination of the Scriptures and comparing the Scriptures with their doctrines. If a doctrine is like the Bible, it is true. But when there is variance, that which is not of the Bible is false.

Wrong About Deity

They deny the Bible doctrine that Deity includes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They claim the doctrine of the "Trinity" originated with the devil. "There is one solitary being from all eternity, Jehovah God, the Creator and Preserver of the Universe and of all things visible and invisible." (Jehovah of the *Watchtower*, p. 30). They deny the eternal nature of Christ, contending that Christ is a created being. They deny He was God and man while on earth but only a "lesser god." They deny the personality of the Holy Spirit, claiming He is an "invisible active force of Almighty God."

But there is abundant evidence in Scriptures to support the teaching of three persons in the Godhead, all of the same substance, co-equal, co-existent, co-eternal, immutable forever. At the creation we read, *“Let us make man after our likeness.”* (Genesis 1:1). The word translated as “God” is the Hebrew word *“elohim,”* which is a plural word, more than one.

There is nothing in the Bible that teaches Jesus was a “lesser god.” There is one God, not greater and lesser gods. The Bible teaches monotheism, not polytheism. If Christ is any kind of god, He must be eternal and one with Deity in every respect. Jehovah’s Witnesses ask, “Who ran the universe while Jesus was in the grave?” But Christians do not teach that the entire Godhead became flesh and was buried in the tomb. Only the one called the Son did that.

When Christ said, *“All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth,”* (Matthew 28:18), this showed equality with the Father. John 5:23 reads, *“That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him.”* Jesus claimed to be one with the Father (John 17:22).

Wrong About Christ

A denial of the three persons in the Godhead denies the Deity of Christ. That fact is the cornerstone and basic fundamental truth of all of New Testament Christianity. In Hebrews 1:8, He is called God. Christ revealed God in human form. Philippians 2:5-11, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

Hebrews 1:1-4, *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the*

worlds, who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

Colossians 2:9, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." How could this be except His eternal nature? So would it be with Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

Jesus prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John 17:5). This demands an eternal nature, possessed only by Deity. John 1:13,14 expresses, "and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

Wrong About The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not just a glorified "it". He is a person, not an abstract, invisible force and influence. John 14:26, 16:3, and many other passages use the personal pronoun in reference to Him. He possesses the characteristics of a person. He teaches, speaks, makes intercession, has a mind, etc.

When we are baptized, we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). All three are mentioned in Second Corinthians 13:14. Space prohibits continued citations of Scriptures that prove beyond any question that the Godhead (Deity) is composed of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Deny Bodily Resurrection

It is but a short step from denying the Deity of Christ to deny His bodily resurrection. "The man Christ Jesus was resurrected a divine spirit creature after offering the ransom for obedient man." (Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 30). They claim He did not appear in the same body as before His crucifixion. He was resurrected only as a spirit. The writings of Russell teach that He was "dissolved in gases or is preserved somewhere as a memorial to God's love."

The Bible tells a different story. "But Thomas, one of the

twelve called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them, then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord, and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20:24-29). It would be difficult to persuade those disciples that Jesus arose from the tomb only a spirit being. No reasonable person would dare say the body of Jesus was not manifest at that time. Christ said specifically that He was not just spirit, but flesh. “And as he thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and saith unto them. Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them. Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish and of an honeycomb. And he took it and did eat before them.” (Luke 24:36-43).

Furthermore, there were many appearances of Jesus before people in addition to these (First Corinthians 15:3-8). To deny His bodily resurrection is to deny the truth.

Wrong About His Return

JW's teach that Christ returned to this earth in 1914, and is now here in spirit. We do not deny that Christ is here in spirit, inasmuch as He promised He would be (Matthew 28:20). But not in the sense that the JW's teach. Jesus Christ has returned to earth in A.D. 1914, they say, and has expelled Satan from Heaven and is proceeding to overthrow Satan's organization and will establish the Theocratic Millennial Kingdom and vindicate the name of Jehovah God. He did not return in a

physical form and is invisible as the Logos. Nobody saw Him come, but He came secretly and quietly, they teach. There is no explanation as to how they propose to prove this claim. Russell first claimed He came in 1874, but JW's are silent about that claim.

Again, Scripture tells a different story. His return will not be invisible and secret, but visible and audible (First Thessalonians 4:16,17). At His ascension it was promised, *"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 heave, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:9-11). Second Peter 3:10, *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."* To deny His physical coming and claim a secret invisible coming that is already past is to deny Scripture.

Wrong About Immortality

JW's deny the immortality of the soul of man. They are rank materialists. Man, to them, is wholly mortal, like animals, and cease to exist once they die. "The soul of man is not eternal but mortal, and it can die. Animals likewise have souls, though man has the preeminence by special creation." (Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 30).

But the Bible teaches man is a soul, a spirit, in the likeness of God. Consider the teaching of the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:17-31). Both men lived and both men died, but both men existed after death. Both were in a state of consciousness. The body that was buried was something different from that which went into the unseen world.

Ecclesiastes 12:7, *"And the dust returneth to the earth as it was and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it."* Jesus taught, *"Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of*

damnation.” (John 5:28,29). That is not the teaching that harmonizes with the cessation of man’s existence at death.

When Jesus was confronted with those who denied life after death in much the same fashion as do the JW’s, He said, “*Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*” (Matthew 22:29-32). These patriarchs had long ago physically died, but Jesus said they were living. Does this sound like the JW doctrine that the spirit of man dies and ceases to be?

Wrong About Punishment

One final observation. JW’s deny a continuous and eternal punishment for anybody. “Hell, meaning a place of ‘fiery torment’ where sinners remain after death until the resurrection, does not exist. This is a doctrine of ‘Organized Religion,’ not the Bible. Hell is the common grave of mankind, literally, *SHEOL* (Hebrew), ‘a place of rest in hope’ where the departed sleep until the resurrection by Jehovah God.”

They also teach, “Eternal punishment is a punishment or penalty of which there is no end. It does not mean ‘eternal torment’ of living souls. Annihilation, the second death, is the lot of all those who reject Jehovah God, and it is eternal.” (Both statements from Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 30,31).

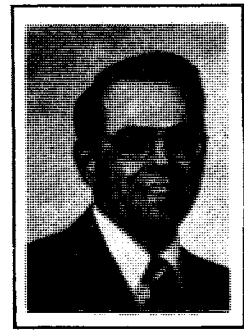
When you compare that doctrine with Second Thessalonians 1:7-9, you see how false the JW doctrine is. Matthew 25:46 refutes it altogether. Revelation 20:10 teaches contrary to it. Their doctrine is consoling, there being no punishment. The worst that could happen to us is that we cease to exist. But it is just not true.

There are other JW precepts that are false, but this has already been extended sufficiently to prove beyond doubt that Jehovah never taught what these who claim to be His witnesses teach. They are false teachers with false doctrines, producing a false religion, and deserving of exposure, opposition, rejection and refutation. They also deserve to hear the truth that they might believe the truth, obey it, and be saved.

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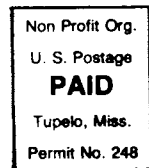
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Almost And Altogether

26:28, 29

Acts 2:28. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." There is a vast difference between "almost" and "altogether." For instance, I can recall many years ago when I was in high school when our little country school football team played against a team that was year after year a contender for the championship. To even score against that opponent would have been a major accomplishment for a team like our team. We played so hard and moved the ball within seven yards of the goal with four downs to get it across. When the fourth down had been run we were about as close as one could get but still not over the line. We "almost" made it, but not "altogether."

When living in South Bend, Indiana I recall a fire in the neighboring Chicago at a school building. One small boy was at a window on the second floor. His father was calling for him to jump and he would catch him and he would be saved. But the small boy was too frightened to move and was later identified among the dead, having been overcome with smoke. He was "almost" rescued, but not "altogether."

Across the road from where I was reared was a family of children whose father had drowned some years earlier. He was fishing and allowed his boat to drift too close to the perilous waters around a lock in the river. The boat overturned and he attempted to swim to the bank. He was reportedly within ten yards of the bank when his weary body cramped and he went under. He "almost" reached safety, but not "altogether." Surely, we can see the vast difference. As the song teaches, "Almost is but to fail, almost, but lost."

Then And Now

Some people of whom we read in the Bible were almost Christians. Some were altogether Christians. It is the same today. Felix said, "Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." But that season never came and he was banished from his position. As far as we can know, he died out of Christ. Agrippa was the one who said, "With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian." But he left the courtroom where he had heard Paul preach, just as lost as he was when he entered. In Athens, Paul

preached, “*Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, We will hear thee concerning this yet again.*” (Acts 17:32). But if Paul was successful in planting the cause of Christ in that city of self-sufficient sophisticates, as he had been successful elsewhere, we do not read of it.

In contrast, we read of the people on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Cornelius, Saul of Tarsus, Lydia, the jailor of Philippi, the Corinthians. They were not just “almost,” but “altogether” converted to Christ.

What is it to be “almost” a Christian? It means that one is close to becoming a child of God, but is not yet born into His family. One may have the knowledge of what to do to be a Christian, but has not acted on that knowledge. We must know the truth to be freed by the truth (John 8:32). But one can know what is right and still not do what is right. “*To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*” (James 4:17). On Pentecost, many others besides the 3,000 who obeyed heard the same message and the same instructions, but they did not obey as did the 3,000. Some today, possibly even some who read these words, may know what to do to be saved, but until it is done they remain nothing better than “almost” a Christian, but not “altogether.” Recently a young man expressed to me, with tones of regret, that he knew as well as anyone what was required to be a Christian, but he was not yet willing to give up certain habits in his life that a Christian cannot practice. He is “almost,” but not “altogether” saved. “*Many are called, but few are chosen.*” (Matthew 22:14).

To Desire Is Only Almost

Having a desire to become a Christian is just “almost,” but not “altogether.” Agrippa believed the preaching of Paul. Before the Jews became Christian on Pentecost they expressed their desire to be followers of Christ by their question, “*What must we do?*” They cared that much to want to be a Christian. The Ethiopian had the desire to be baptized before he was baptized. Many see the advantages of coming to Christ, but until they actually do that which is commanded, they are merely “almost,” but not “altogether” saved.

Some, although they do not become Christians, will even make drastic changes in their way of living, and for the better. But just reforming our behavior is not sufficient. Reformation of

life must follow becoming a Christian. This change of lifestyle will result from a change of heart and relationship to God. Repentance is absolutely necessary in becoming a Christian. *"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3). This is the change of mind or change of heart. Ephesians 4:22-24 shows the change of life that results. *"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."* Those who repent, but nothing more, can never become a true child of God. Those who genuinely repent will not continue to live in sin (Romans 6:1,2). But good moral living, as vital as it is to faithfulness in Christ, is not sufficient to make one a Christian. Nobody can ever be good enough to be counted among the saved on the basis of their goodness. Salvation includes doing the will of God (Matthew 7:21), but salvation is not by works of merit of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor works of our own righteousness, but by the mercy of God (Titus 3:3-5). We must be "good" as a Christian, but we can be "good" in many respects and remain separated from the only Savior there is. Certainly, being "good" makes for a better life, and is surely beneficial for those around you. But such is not God's plan for saving man. Many good moral people are not Christians. Cornelius (Acts 10) was a good moral man before he was even taught the way of salvation through Christ. But he was lost because he was not yet in Christ where all spiritual blessings are provided (Ephesians 1:3).

Stopping Short

Almost becoming a Christian is like making steps toward a door, putting your hand on the knob, turning the knob, flinging the door open, but never going through the doorway. The "almost saved" are just as lost as ever. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus..."* (Romans 8:1). This is not true of those who remain out of Christ, even those "almost" in Christ.

Let me tell you of the way to be "altogether" a Christian, and it really does not take very long when we confine ourselves to the Scriptures. A person must hear the gospel because, *"Faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17). Having heard, and this is the reason for preaching, one

must believe in Christ as the Son of God. “*Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*” (John 8:24). “*Without faith it is impossible to be pleasing unto him.*” (Hebrews 11:6). One must repent of sins, as already noted. The very first command the apostle Peter gave to those who had heard the word and indicated their faith by their question, was to “*repent...*” (Acts 2:38). Paul taught those in Athens, “*God commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*” (Acts 17:30). One is to confess his faith in Christ as the Son of God. “*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*” (Romans 10:9,10). One must be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). “*Repent and be baptized,*” was the divinely guided command by Peter in Acts 2:38. The reason was clearly expressed as being “*for the remission of sins.*” Jesus said, “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*” (Mark 16:16). “*Baptism doth now also save us...*” (First Peter 3:21). This is the action man takes to reach the blood of Christ that was shed in His death (Romans 6:3,4). This is how one gets “*into Christ*” where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10).

Must Go The Distance

Not until we have completed the process that God has specified can we properly make the claim that we are saved. No man has the right to set aside any teaching of the Lord and still claim he has the blessing anyway. When we do as the Bible teaches we are “altogether” saved. Until we do that we are at best, only “almost.” Jesus said, “*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46).

Once in Christ, we are to live in a manner befitting a Christian. It is one thing to BECOME a Christian, and a lifetime of service, work, and worship to BE a Christian.

Tragic things happen in this world. An automobile “almost” got across the railroad track, but not “altogether” and the occupants died. The child “almost” got out of the street before the car arrived, but not “altogether.” The miners “almost” got out of the mine before it collapsed. The airplane “almost” made it to the runway but crashed a few hundred yards short.

When Russia crushed the freedom-hungry people of Hungary, many people fled their homeland into Austria. One

woman told the story how she, her husband, and their two children crossed a snowy field toward the border of deliverance. As they approached the last barbed-wire fence that was designed to prevent escape, her husband helped her and the children over it and into safety. As the husband started over a rifle shot rang through the night. The husband yelled to his family to run as fast as they could toward the border. More shots, and the husband fell. Wounded, he struggled and crawled, but not very far until he fell dead. The wife and children were “altogether” delivered. The husband was “almost.” What a sad and tragic event!

A Tragic “Almost”

Jesus once told a man, “*One thing thou lackest.*” (Matthew 10:21). To another He said, “*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*” (Mark 12:34). It may be that way with you, dear reader. Please! Will you not make it “altogether,” rather than just ‘almost?’

† † † † †

The Love Of God

Occasionally we are blessed with special foods and “goodies” that are pleasing to our appetites, such as a Thanksgiving meal, or some special dinner where a veritable feast is laid before us. We thoroughly enjoy those delicious things. But after a season of that we get weary of it and long for the plain and simple foods of everyday that nourish and benefit our bodies. After a stay somewhere as “company” for a week or so, even like being away from home in a gospel meeting, how fine it is to get back to “home cooking.” We also get hungry for certain themes of the Bible. They are not new and sensational. They are familiar to us and really quite “everyday” in many respects. But they nourish the soul and satisfy the longings in our hearts. One such Biblical theme is the love of God. So let us attune our thinking with Biblical thinking on this subject.

Two Directions

We first need to consider how the phrase, “the love of God,” might have two meanings. It could refer to the love we have for God, or it might refer to the love God has for us. The phrase could point in opposite directions until you understand the context in which it is used.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.” (First John 5:3). This refers to the love that man has for God and how love is demonstrated by obedience.

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” (First John 4:9). Here the phrase refers to the love God has for man and how He has demonstrated it by sending His Son, Jesus Christ. This same idea is embodied in Romans 8:38,39. *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Man can quit loving God. But God, though He hates our sins, so long as we remain faithful in Christ, He shall never cease to love us. What a wonderful blessing and source of comfort! It is the love that God has for man that we shall emphasize in this lesson.

Divine Traits

We can develop a distorted idea about the love God has for us if we listen to the doctrines of men. We could get the idea that God is like some overindulgent grandparent, some all-powerful Santa Claus, that only gives and gives, never punishes, omits discipline, and really does not require much of us. We may get the idea that He loves us so much that nothing we can do will really displease Him. But what a mistaken concept of God and His love that would be! There are other aspects to the nature of God that must be respected as well as this kindly side to the love of God.

Yes, God is omnipotent, which means all-powerful. Man has discovered nuclear power, but God created it. Man studies the universe, but God spoke it into existence. The grandeur, power, and severity of God is evident in the world God made. We know this because the Scripture teaches us that the heavens

declare His glory and handiwork.

We know that God is omniscient, which means all-knowing. He knows even the thoughts and intents of the hearts of men.

We know God is omnipresent, which means ever-present, everywhere. There is no place to escape God's awareness (Psalm 139:7-12).

We must also respect the justice of God and His fairness in dealing with mankind. God is the judge of all through Christ (Acts 17:31). He does not look upon righteousness and unrighteousness just the same. That we shall be judged is inevitable (Second Corinthians 5:10), and following this assurance we are told of both the goodness and severity of God. God rewards, but God also punishes. The love of God would be superficial and hypocritical if God made no distinction between right and wrong in His dealings with mankind.

As we ponder the immeasurable love of God, let us not allow ourselves to think of His love in some distorted and unwarranted way.

Men have written many poems, songs, prose, trying to define their concept of the magnificence of love. Even human love is beyond adequate description. How far short we fall in trying to compare the love of God with anything that we can fairly compare. Recognizing my inability to picture such a trait in words that would do justice, let me only suggest that when you think of the very summity of everything good and wonderful, you are approaching the thoughts of the love of God.

God's Love For Man

God has always loved man and manifested His love. God created the beautiful world in which man lives. Placing man in the Garden of Eden was a token of His love. Even when man disobeyed Him and God forced man from the garden lest man live in rebellion eternally, God gave hint of His plan to redeem man. "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" (Genesis 3:15).

This was what God said to Satan who had lied and deceived mankind to sin. The seed of woman was to provide the way for mankind to overcome the destruction Satan desires for him. That seed referred to Christ, born of the virgin, the seed of woman, not man and woman.

God loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, giving them great

blessings and promises. He has sent the rain, sunshine, seasons, life, the productivity of the soil, the minerals of the earth from which man has been able to accomplish so much for his welfare.

God has provided divine guidance and instruction regarding the way man should live, not only to be pleasing to God, but also to find the real happiness, blessedness, and contentment in life that God would have all to know. There is not anyone who has ever lived but he or she could sing, “*God is love.*”

So Great A Love

The greatest evidence of God’s love is the gift of Jesus. “*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). This passage speaks of the love of God. No passage says that God is power, even though He is. No passage says that God is justice, even though He is just. But First John 4:8 says, “*God is love.*” Notice it does not say that love is God, as some have evidently determined. The way some speak of love, you would get the idea that nothing else really matters except love. They make His commandments optional. Morality is not too important. Nothing is significant to them if there is love, as they conceive of love. Of course, genuine and true love cannot exist without man’s conformity to the will of God. But love is not God. God is love. This is a special and wonderful characteristic of God toward mankind.

The passage speaks of this marvelous exhibition of His love, the sacrifice of His Son for man’s benefit. It speaks of that benefit which is salvation for man, the gift of eternal life.

Love Demonstrated

The love of God is manifested through Christ. Jesus, His Son, born in a manger, having no earthly home, living a perfect life, having given up the treasures of existence with God and equality with Him (Philippians 2:5-8), suffering all the deprivations, humiliations and injustices that people of His day (and our day, too) could heap against Him, Jesus is the way that God has shown His love. Even His death on the cross was a continued demonstration of the love of God toward man.

Jesus once said, “*Greater love hath no man that this; that he lay down his life for his friends.*” (John 15:13). But Jesus even went beyond that greatest love that man can show. He died

even for His enemies. Paul wrote, *“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:6-8). In sin we are at enmity with God (James 4:4). Yet, even while we were enemies, the love of God was manifested toward us.

We know that it is man’s prime purpose in life to do the will of God (Ecclesiastes 12:13). But cannot we also understand that the love that God has for man is for man’s own good? The least that man could do is return that love with as much sincerity and fervor that he can. How grieved God must be when any person for whom He has shown such love defies Him and rebels against Him! The love of God mandates that we love Him in return. It is our ruin to fail to do so.

How To Love God

Man shows his love for God by doing the will of God. There is no such thing as loving God apart from obeying God. But do we really love God? Are we showing God we love Him the way He says we must show our love? Have we obeyed the gospel? This means believing that Jesus is the Son of God and putting our confidence and faith in Him, repenting of our sins, confessing our faith in Him, and being baptized for the remission of sins? Are we walking in the light as He is in the light? This is the way we return “the love of God.”

† † † † †

WITHOUT A DOUBT one of the comforting satisfactions in standing for the truth against those who either resist it, ignore it, or deny it, is the knowledge that you have done what is right when you stand. From both within and without the church there are those who are guided more by friendship and personal accomodation than by loyalty to the revealed Word. Many disappoint you by their compromises. But standing for the right is what God expects.

Launch Out Into The Deep

“And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing, nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their nets brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken, and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.” (Luke 5:1-11).

This event in the life of Christ is familiar to Bible students. It shows the greatness of the Lord, His miraculous power, and that He was a master at teaching and illustrating His teaching. We shall primarily concern ourselves with one statement of Jesus, *“Launch out into the deep.”* Of course, His instruction was that Peter take the boat into deeper water and there would be a great catch of fish. Such was the result. There are great meanings to us even in the Lord’s use of this illustration and demonstration.

Two Extremes to Avoid

Many people are inclined to follow one of two extremes regarding religious activity. Some are often so careful and cautious, afraid of making a mistake, that they do nothing or almost nothing. They hold back from doing the good that they

can and should do. On the other hand, some are so reckless, careless, and ungoverned by the Word of God that they do almost anything, whether it is authorized of God or not. To them, being active is not just an essential part of serving God. It is just about the whole thing. God's people are not given to such extremes either way. They try to be careful but not careless. They want to do right and be right, and be busy in the Lord's business. Doing what is right, in the right way, for the right purpose is the mission of the child of God.

We need to be impressed that Christ expects His people to be doers, not just hearers (James 1:22; Matthew 7:21). These fishermen that Jesus approached were people of action. In fact, they had been working all night with little success. They were discouraged. But the Lord persuaded them to get involved in doing some more. They needed to "*launch out*" and be active once again.

We must remember that there is a difference between "busy-ness" and really doing the Lord's business. May we present at least three things we must keep in mind.

Awake Or Asleep

The Christian is alert. He is not dead, asleep, lazy, and indigent. He is attentive and keenly aware. Paul admonished the brethren at Ephesus, "*Awake thou that sleepest.*" (Ephesians 5:14). Nobody can do what God wants done if they are not alert and active.

What are some of the characteristics of a congregation that is awake? You will find most, if not all, of the members active in Bible study. Families include their children and bring, not just send, they children. They will be on time to worship, participate in the studies, singing fervently and with enthusiasm. Their contributions are sincerely given and possibly growing in amount week by week. There is good attendance on Sunday evening. They have a busy mission program, watchful for every opportunity to spread the Word of God by every means available and within their capacity to utilize. Each member is striving to be more and more like Jesus in every affair of life. When there is a congregation of people like that, you have an alert congregation.

As we keep busy, we must be progressive. Every organization either progresses or grows stale and stagnant, whether it is a business, a club, or a congregation. That which does not grow

becomes stymied in its strength. There is a vast difference between being progressive and digressive. We dare not confuse the two. We can “progress” beyond the doctrine of Christ and lose our souls (Second John 9-11). That is not real progression but digression. Seeking a new message, a new gospel, is not making progress. Leaving the “old paths” for new ground of the wisdom of men is digression, not progression. Some get carried away with something new and are not sufficiently concerned about whether it is authorized and true to God’s will. Jesus said, “*If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples.*” (John 8:31). But to leave His word is to digress. Many digressive steps have been taken through the years under the guise of progressing. There has been an alteration of the message to accommodate for the innovation of methods. We are to “press on” and go forward, but we have to be sure we are going the right direction.

Fervent, Not Fearful

As we are active, we must also be militant and aggressive. It is our duty to press the attack against all evil and for all righteousness. We are soldiers of Christ, our captian. We are to put on the armor of spiritual warfare and fight the good fight of faith with fervor and determination. The adversary is the enemy; the battleground is the heart of man; the victory is man’s conversion to and faithfulness in Christ. We are not to be fearful (Hebrews 13:6), but give the warfare our full and complete effort. We must be ready to go on the offensive as well as be set for the defense of the gospel. Alert, progressive, and aggressive are characteristics of those who follow Christ.

Christ told Peter to “*Launch out into the deep.*” They had been in shallow water and there had been no catch. Many times we stay too close to shore to “catch” the souls that can be won for Christ. Every congregation had its beginning at some time. There were obstacles and problems in getting started. There was much work involved. Seed was sown. With great faith and hope and love, the congregation launched out on its mission of service to God and man. Sometimes it is more difficult to keep something going than it is to get something started. But once a work is started, opportunity and labor awaits those involved. The gospel is to be preached. The lost must hear and be persuaded to be saved. The saved must be grounded and strengthened and firmly rooted. All need to be taught and

instructed. The physical needs for which the church is obligated must be met. The sick and bereaved need comforting. The hungry need food. Those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness need to learn of the bread of life and the water of life, which is Christ. With millions of this world living and dying, lost and doomed, there is the work of taking Christ to the world. That is the work of the church. This is that which God demands and expects.

God is looking to each congregation, with its elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, and every member of the body to be "*fishers of men.*" This can seldom, if ever, be accomplished by hovering in safety close to the shore.

Guarded Excitement

Launching out into the deep carries with it a spirit of adventure and challenge. Hearts pound with anticipation when the needy are relieved, souls are taught and brought to Christ, brethren are fortified and restored. Davy Crockett was a pioneer with a spirit of adventure, doing exciting things. The Christian life is an exciting life because of that which one does for Christ. Let us not be confused, however, to think that just because what we are doing is exciting that we are necessarily doing what the Lord wants done. I recall a teacher of young people telling the young that they ought to get as excited at church as they do at a ball game. He missed the point badly. Worship is not a time to arouse emotions and "turn people on" and provoke excitement. People can get excited and still be far amiss from doing what they ought for God. But when one is doing what God has taught to be done, this is an exciting adventure.

Pray tell me what should stir the heart of a child of God anymore than seeing a precious soul, that shall exist in all eternity, converted to Christ, renouncing sin and Satan, and giving himself to that which is holy and right? And what greater thrill is there than to have had a part in that person's salvation? Jesus sent forth the challenge, "*Come ye after me and I will make you fishers of men.*" We need to launch out into this effort just as Peter did when he was told to take his boat into deeper water.

Peter was not told to be content to just push out a few feet. This he did to provide the Lord a pulpit from which to speak. But to catch fish, he had to launch out into the deep. This took some risk, some effort, and a lot of determination, plus

obedience.

Launch Out Or Dry Up

Many churches have launched out into the deep. But some become satisfied and content with past accomplishments and withdraw their nets. No congregation can rest on its laurels, dream of the past, reflect on the old battles won, gaze on the trophies of former victories, and keep growing and doing. We have opportunity today we did not have yesterday, and shall have opportunities tomorrow that we do not yet have today. We must lay hold on every one, and proceed with caution, through every open door.

To successfully accept the challenge to “*launch out into the deep*” we must have faith: faith in God, faith in our mission, faith in ourselves. We must stand as did Paul, “*ready to preach the gospel...*” We find no place for the foot dragger, those who want to hold back for fear, those who refuse to cooperate, those who wish to obstruct. Making sure first of all that we stand on the solid ground of revealed truth, we must get busier as we have opportunity. Working together, with God’s help, there can be souls in heaven that otherwise would never be. The name of God can be glorified that otherwise would never have occurred.

But who will accept the challenge? Who will “*launch out*” in confidence and obedience to follow the instructions of the Lord? Will it be me, or your, or do we wait for another? Peter, though tired, was ready to do what Jesus said simply because Jesus said to do it. When we have that same submissive attitude, and the same respect for Christ, we will “*launch out into the deep*” in the search for the lost, knowing, talking, thinking, and doing the will of the Lord.

† † † † †

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No Room In The Inn

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Ceasar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. [And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.] And all went to be taxed every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, [because he was of the house and lineage of David,] to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:1-7).

Even though the life of Christ that is recorded for us is relatively limited, there are many significant events recorded and some of the statements surrounding these events escape our attention. From them we can extract many helpful lessons for our present and eternal benefit. Such is the phrase, *“because there was no room for them in the inn.”*

The event was the birth of Jesus the Christ. It was the highest kind of world-shaking event, even though the world knew it not at the time. The circumstances surrounding His birth were very humble indeed. Yet, the effect of it remains and ever shall remain.

“Christmas” Celebration

During what is called by many as the “Christmas Season” some people celebrate the birth of Christ. Those who are guided by the authority of God do not celebrate such a day as the birth of Christ because there is no authority to do so. We cannot just act without due regard for the teaching that we do what we do by His authority (Colossians 3:17). As historians and astronomers have determined, about the only thing that we can be certain as to the time of year of His birth is that December 25, was not it. So we do not wish to attach religious significance to what can otherwise be a very joyful social and family custom.

We also need to remove the accumulated fiction from around the record of his birth. Many fanciful stories have been told

connected with it that simply have no basis whatever in Scripture. The time of enrollment was a time of taxation. Every man was to go to the home of his ancestry to be taxed. Joseph, being of the house of David, went to Bethlehem, the city of David, taking Mary, his wife, with him. Mary was soon to give birth to the child that had been conceived in her by the miraculous power of God, she being a virgin and remaining a virgin until after His birth.

Accommodations were hard to come by. In fact, there were none available for Joseph and Mary when they arrived. They took shelter in a barn or a stable. In this environment, the child Jesus was born, and was laid in a manger, the feeding trough for animals. We cannot help but wonder if the innkeeper had only known that Mary carried within her the long looked-for Messiah, that he would have provided better facilities. But there simply was not any room anywhere for Jesus.

Still No Room

The sad truth of the matter, there was not only no room for Him at His birth, but so many, many times men have no room for Him in their lives even yet. The world really did not want Jesus, even though the world needed Jesus. Look at the conduct of Herod, King of Judea, who sought the life of the child once he learned of him. The way this special family escaped from his wickedness was through the warning to the wise men who had inquired of him to return home another way. (Matthew 2:13). Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fled into Egypt.

After Jesus began His personal ministry, His own people had no room for Him. *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."* (John 1:11). He grew up in Nazareth and was not received by the Nazarenes. When He came there to read the Scriptures and to teach, the teaching was so displeasing to them that their reaction was actually violent. *"And they all in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong, but He passing through the midst of them went his way."* (Luke 4:28-30). They had no room for Him.

Certainly the ruler of the Jews had no room for Christ. Even though they were the religious leaders, who should have understood the prophets concerning Him, they rejected Him.

Even though they taught that a Messiah was to come, they entertained preconceived notions regarding the Messiah and when He did come, they did not recognize Him. They fought against Him with all their power and influence. *“But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him.”* (Luke 19:47).

Most of the Samaritans had no room for Him either. When He came into their borders, going from Galilee to Jerusalem to the feast of tabernacles, He passed through their villages and they even refused Him permission to stay overnight. The hatred the Jews and Samaritans had one for the other extended with emphasis against Jesus. *“And it came to pass when the time was come for him to be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. And sent messengers before his face, and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.”* (Luke 9:51-53).

From these and similar records, we see that Jesus was not wanted by the people of His time. There was no room for Him, from birth to death. He was constantly being rejected by most people.

Worse Than Unwanted

The world even treated Christ worse than they usually treated men they did not like or did not know. The world takes compassion on the refugee, the wanderer, the man who is “down on his luck.” People offer a helping hand, organize to assist those upon whom misfortune falls. But it was not so for Christ. Although He was a wanderer without a home, having no possessions [*“Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay hid head,”* (Luke 9:58)], even though He was hated and despised, tortured and persecuted unjustly, [*“He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,”* (Isaiah 53:3)], men did not have compassion and pity toward Him. They had no room for Him.

Finally the world felt it had ridded itself of Him when He was killed on the cross of Calvary. But the story of Jesus does not end with His death. Nor did man’s rejection of Him dispose of Him. But does the world even today have room for Him? We speak not of His person in the flesh, but for His gospel message of salvation, the blessings of God that are provided only through

Him. Does the world care for Him in life, word, deed, and attitude?

Where Is Room For Him?

Is there any room for Christ in the business world? Do those who operate the shops, stores, offices, markets, consider Him? How can they while shortchanging others, taking advantage, stealing, being dishonest and gaining unfair gain, cheating on the job? Someone has said that business is business and religion is something else. That is partly true, but not altogether. Christ and His ways belong in your manner of earning a living and conducting your business affairs. If that is not the case with us, then we are not faithful to Christ. Business and religion do mix and must mix as far as business activities being governed by principles of truth and honesty and concern for others.

Education?

Is there any room for Christ in the educational institutions? More and more the public educational systems of America have seen Christ and His Word driven out by the increased influence of those who hate God. Even the moral and ethical truths have been taken away. And schools are more and more becoming the breeding ground for humanism and every vile and evil practice. Teachers, textbooks, and curricula are designed to deny the teaching of Christ, ridiculing it, and filling the minds of youth with the Satanic influence of atheism, immorality, violence and sin. Whether by design or through negligence, the American public school system has become one of the worst enemies New Testament Christianity has in the entire nation. It is undoing the very things God wants done.

Society?

Is there room for Christ in society generally? Consider the gross immorality, drunkenness, lasciviousness, reveling, cursing, pride, envy, hate, murder, etc., ever on the increase year after year. That is contrary to the will of the Lord. He could not feel "at home" in the midst of such depravity. Society thinks so little of the Lord, and many who think of Him at all either hate Him or totally ignore Him.

Government?

Is there any room for Christ in the governing of this world among nations? Would there be the war, hatred, greed, scandal, dishonesty, lying, theft, etc. if Christ had a place in the hearts of the rulers of the world? Let some man have an attitude of respect for God assume a place of power and he is either soon corrupted or is banished from power. Political leaders seldom refer to the God of heaven and call upon Him for guidance. They ignore the principles in His Word. They themselves are participants in every vile and worldly activity, determined to satisfy their own greed and passion regardless of the welfare of the nations. The depth of political decay, regardless of how long the blighted history of it can be traced, is a cancer on the scene of the world. Integrity in government is so seldom found that most do not even expect it anymore. There is no room for the Lord in the international organizations because so many worship false gods and care not for the true and living God.

Homes?

But we must ask, does Jesus have any room in our homes? What of that home where worship never occurs, where prayers are never heard, where Scripture is disrespected rather than taught? Is He in homes where there is a lack of love, kindness, and consideration one for the other? Is He in homes wrecked by divorce and unfaithfulness to duty and each other? Is He included in the family finances, time, activities? If someone came to your door and asked, "Does Christ live here?" how would you answer? He ought to be the head of the home.

Churches?

As fantastic as it may sound, Christ does not even find room in many churches. He has to take a back seat and His will is set aside in favor of what the church members, or its clergy, or governing board, or creed book determines ought to be. When the truth of Christ is not respected and His authority is not supreme in a religious group, there is no way to conclude that Christ has room in that church. It is certainly not the church of Christ. It may even wear the name, "Church of Christ," but unless His will prevails, it is misnamed. Many are following what their disciplines teach, the catechisms, manuals, prayer books,

prominent clergy, or monied members might declare, but not the will of Christ.

The Heart?

But while it is evident that Christ has no room in so many places today, does He have room in your heart and life? Paul prayed, *“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.”* (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Those who have never become Christians have not made room for Him. Those who walk unfaithfully have no room for Him. So we plead, in the words of the hymn, “Have you any room for Jesus? Knocking at your heart is He! Hear Him, open, open, bid Him enter! He has much in store for thee.”

† † † † †

Attendance At Worship

“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together; whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.” (Psalm 122).

Most lessons are privileges and opportunities to present; some are not as enjoyable to deliver as others, but they are necessary just the same. I am convinced it is never right to deliberately make somebody mad. But sometimes you cannot help it. There are lessons where you have to run that risk. It is of some comfort to know that Christ often ran that risk and did sometimes make

some mad. Paul ran that risk and made some people mad. Preachers have a duty to preach plainly. If he is true to God, the truth, his brethren, and himself, he must speak plainly. It is not uncommon for some to call that “hard preaching.” But why would anybody want a preacher that would not teach what needs to be taught? Those that are honest regarding their service to God want no other kind. If a preacher thought he saw the need for a lesson on a certain subject from God’s Word and shied away from it, avoided it, just because he would run the risk of making somebody mad at him, he is not worth his salt.

Straight Talk

This lesson includes some straight talk. It may make some who read it very angry. But you can be assured that such is not the intent. It is presented to help. You might feel I am picking on somebody, but I am not picking on anybody specifically, but on everybody to whom these words will apply. I trust that you have enough justice and fairness to accept what I present in the same helpful spirit I shall try to present it. I trust you will reflect upon what is taught and search the Scriptures concerning it. The origin of the thoughts and the basis of the lesson is the Word of God that concerns a fundamental Christian and primary responsibility. The motive behind the presentation is the salvation of souls, mine and yours.

Some of us will likely go to hell unless we make some changes. No, this is not being guilty of judging you. It is being guilty of observing. It is being guilty of listening. The relationship of some of us to the church and to the worship of God is far from what the Bible requires. It would be a shame for anyone in the church to be lost, but it is a possibility. Since God’s Word is true, some of us may hear the terrible words, “*Depart from me,*” unless we make some changes in our conduct and behavior regarding worship.

Few people who have lived on earth have as great an opportunity to know and do the will of God as those of us who live in this country (USA) right now. We have been abundantly blessed with every conceivable blessing and many luxuries in addition to that. There is no excuse, no justifiable reason, why any of us should be lost in that last day, except for the fact that we might not change what needs changing.

What About Duty?

Why may some of us be lost? What change must we make? Many give every appearance of trying to slip into heaven, sneak in, creep in, with a “get-by” attitude. There are duties enjoined on every that becomes a Christian. We must meet those duties if we expect to enter heaven. We must not think we can dismiss these duties and all be well with the soul. If we think so, we are in for a rude awakening and disappointment. We may be able to “get-by” in this life with half-way doing as we ought on our jobs, in our schoolwork, and other things. We may be content to judge ourselves by others and consider ourselves acceptable because we have determined we are at least “average.” But do we actually think we can slip by the all-seeing eye of God? If so, how deceived we are!

Some evidently think they are going to heaven by trying to do as little for God as they think they can. While we know we cannot earn heaven and must rely on God’s grace, let us not think this dismisses our duty to obey. Many lessons can be drawn from Matthew 25:41, but one of them is that we must not be content with doing as little as possible, but must strive to do as much as possible. “*And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*” The sentiment is doing more than is expected. This attitude of doing just enough to “get by” is an attitude that will cause us to fall short. We sing “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” and “Take My Life And Let It Be Consecrated Lord To Thee,” but how sincere are we? We sing “All To Jesus I Surrender,” but when it comes to worship periods we frequently allow many things to interfere, or we attend only so much as will allow us to soothe our consciences. Do we really go that second mile? Many give the appearance that they have to be pushed the first mile. Some may go the first mile but not a step more.

Do I Have To?

For example, during the years I have been trying to preach so many have asked, “Do I have to attend church every Sunday?” Some have actually asked that, while others have asked it without verbalizing it. They ask it, and answer it, by their actions and example. We need to understand, first of all, that we do not just “attend church.” We assemble to worship God. Does not that put the matter in a different light? Some are so lax that they do not attend even the worship service when the Lord’s Supper is prepared, at least, not regularly. If something else comes

along that they see fit to do, the worship of God is neglected. If you have a problem with Hebrews 10:25, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is...*" (and still is), your problem is not with any person, preacher, elder, or brother. You have a problem with inspired Scripture.

Some just dismiss God from their minds, if actions reveal anything, and do whatever they wish when they have company visiting. They show more respect for their visitors than for God. They will excuse themselves from their sacred duty if they want to work. Many work and miss services all day long on the Lord's Day, even when they do not have to work. Think what God must think about that! Why should God excuse that? Rather than letting work interfere with worship, have you ever considered letting worship interfere with work? Has not the Lord promised He will provide if we seek Him and His kingdom first? (Matthew 6:33). In over thirty years of preaching I have never known of a Christian who could not arrange things to attend at least one worship period on Lord's Day if he tried hard enough to do it. Many simply place their jobs before God. Do you have more respect for your company, your boss, your income, than God? Dislike me for saying it if you wish, but first things first is not something I invented or only applicable when convenient.

It has always been strange to me that some can so often "feel bad" on Sunday, get better Sunday afternoon, and go about Monday through Saturday doing whatever they want. I know that sickness is a problem at times. But possibly the sickness may be more spiritual than physical.

Even Sunday Might?

"Do I have to come Sunday night, too?" I have never heard those that show they love the Lord more than anything else ever ask that. That very attitude shows something is lacking. "What? Worship again? Twice in one day? Do I have to worship Him who blesses me? Do I have to worship the One who gave me body and soul? Do I have to praise the One who died for me? I already did that. Why do I have to honor my Judge, again?" No, we would not likely put it in those words out loud, but this is what we are asking.

Why is it so unreasonable to worship God for two periods on His day? But in most congregations, anywhere from one third to one half never attend more than one worship period a week. In some churches it is less than twenty-five per cent. When you take

the visitors out of the count, and children not old enough to have obeyed the gospel, you see that a large portion of most congregations fit the very matter of which I speak. You may be one of them. If you are, you are the very one that needs to take a closer look at your relationship with God. The Sunday and Wednesday evening assemblies probably reflect more properly the love for God in a congregation than Sunday morning.

Why do you not attend on mid-week periods? If I told you outright, you would probably get mad. So I will not tell you right now, but ask you. Is it because you already know enough to not study with brethren anymore? Is it because being a good influence and example is not expected of you? Is it because it is hard to get out at night? That may be, for a few. But often that same few can make it out at night to the grocery, a ball game, go visiting, eat supper at a restaurant, go shopping, work at night, or whatever suits. We go and do other things. Why is it too hard to worship God and study His Word?

Let me be very direct and suggest that some of us quit lying to ourselves and to God. The sooner we just admit we lack enough love for God that we ought to have, the sooner we may get busy and do something about our neglect. Absenteeism that could have been attendance is a vote to close the doors of the church and cancel the hours of worship. Is that what you want to contribute to the cause of Christ?

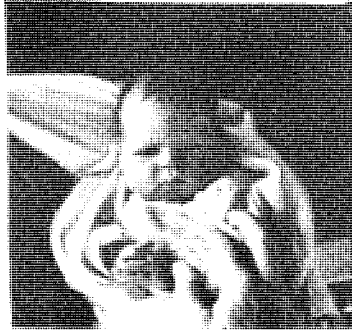
How many times do we place the blame of our irresponsibility on the weather, transportation, headache, etc., but in the worst weather we make it to the store. If lacking transportation we will call someone to assist us. Some find the weather too severe to attend worship on Sunday, but Monday can be worse and they will be at work on time. Does that not strike you as transparent? Let us do ourselves a favor and admit we do not love God.

Do You Mean Me?

Yes, I mean you, and me, and everyone else. Let us not be upset. But let us not go to hell, either. Why should we place our salvation in danger with this “do-as-little-as-I-can” attitude? The person not a Christian cannot make it like he is. Neither shall we make it if we, as Christians, are derelict to our sacred duties as diligently as we can be.

† † † † †

Rebecca
Allison
Boyd



was born in Nashville, Tennessee, December 22, 1984 to Stephen and Carol Boyd. Stephen is our son and his wife is the former Carol Corlew. Needless to announce, Allison is our granddaughter, and a precious little baby she is. This is our second grandchild, both little girls, and our thankfulness for them and their parents is beyond expression.

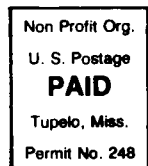
Seeing your family grow toward maturity, and the number of us being more and more, one cannot escaped being impressed with duty and optimism regarding the future. Our prayer for Allison, and all of our children, is that they always be faithful to God as they are this day.

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

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A Burning Fire



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



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Eternal Principles In God's Dealing With Man

Our God is the same God all all the ages. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the One who created the world, who sustains the world, and who shall bring it to an end in His own good time.

Our God also created mankind and has dealt with man throughout all of man's existence. We read of God's dealings with man in the Bible, the inspired Word of God. We want to make very clear that this same God of heaven has dealt with man by the same principles in every age, although not according to the same specific laws.

There have been three dispensations, or systems, by which God has governed man since the creation. Each of these three systems or dispensations have certain peculiarities and distinctions that distinguishes it from the other two. There are certain similarities, even in various specifics. But generally speaking, the variances overshadow the specific similarities. But there have been certain overriding principles that have characterized each dispensation and all three dispensations.

The first dispensation is called the Patriarchal Dispensation, for want of a better term. This term does identify adequately that period and that system we have in mind. It was a system and an age when God spoke through the patriarchs, or heads, of families like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. There was no written law, but God conveyed His will to men through these heads. The fathers served as the priests between man and God. This system covered that indefinite number of years from the creation until God gave the Israelites a different and distinctive system through Moses.

Mosaical

This system is called the Mosaic Dispensation because God gave this law of governing to Moses on Sinai and through him to the singular nation of Israel. It was not a system for all mankind, but exclusively for Israel. There was a written law, and it governed Israel until the time of the system of Christ, approximately 1,500 years.

Christian

Since the cross of Christ, at which time the Mosaic system ceased to be operative for anyone, including the Jews, all men have lived subject to God through the doctrine of Christ. This system began on Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection and ascension and shall continue until time shall be no more and the earth no longer stands. This "Christian Age" corresponds to the "last days" of which we read so much in the New Testament. It is that time and system when God speaks to man through His Son, Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 1:1,2). It is that time and system when Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18).

To demonstrate that there were different laws distinctive to each system, let us be reminded that Cain and Abel were to offer animal sacrifices. This we do not do under Christ. Animal sacrifices also characterized the Mosaic system. God told Noah to build an ark, but nobody in the Mosaic or Christian age is commanded to do such a thing in order to escape God's wrath now. Israel was to observe the Passover feast each year, but neither Christians nor the pre-Mosaic patriarchs observed it. We all serve the same God, but depending on the age and system, there were certain specifics peculiar to each. Neither the patriarchs nor Moses had to observe the Lord's Supper, because this is distinctively Christian. The failure to recognize and distinguish between these systems, the failure to rightly divide the Word of God, the failure to note the different dispensations, has produced much misunderstanding and error in the religious world.

Common Principles

Nonetheless, there are certain principles that characterize God's dealings with man regardless of which age or system under consideration. For instance, there is God's grace. Yes, there was grace in former systems before Christ. We hasten to add that the manifestation of the grace of God under Christ far exceeds anything demonstrated prior to Christ. It is untrue to suggest that there is as much grace in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. "*For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*" (John 1:17). Obviously, there is a distinction to be made about God's grace in the Old and New Testaments. But God did deal with man through grace in former ages. We shall note this later.

God has also dealt with man according to faith. Faith is an eternal principle in the God-man relationship. Trust, confidence, and belief are evident in every age.

God's dealings with man has also included obedience, the doing of His will, carrying out God's commands and instructions. Every age has been noted by obedience.

Not "Alone"

Neither grace, nor faith, nor obedience have stood alone. One without the other has never availed anything of benefit for man standing alone. All three have been necessary and all three have been evident.

Under The Patriarchs

Consider the grace of God, faith, and obedience in the patriarchal age. Was it not a gracious and unmerited favor of God to even give mankind life? Was not placing mankind in the beautiful garden of Eden an unearned favor? Just here we must take note that in the midst of God's grace, God gave man and woman a law by which to live (Genesis 2:16,17). Grace included law. There was and is no conflict between God's grace and God's law.

Faith in God is evident with Adam and Eve when they feared and respected God. Eve even expressed her confidence in God in Genesis 3:2,3. It is true that Satan shook that confidence, but until Satan came on the scene, she believed and trusted God.

Obedience was required of Adam and Eve, but they failed, opening the floodgates of sin upon the world. Now all are tempted and all sin (Romans 3:23).

Noah lived under the patriarchal system. Genesis 6:8 reads, "*But Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah.*" Others were wicked and deserved destruction, but God extended grace unto Noah. God was not forced to do this nor obligated to do it. It was an unearned favor from God. But merely offering salvation to Noah did not accomplish it without his faith and obedience. Genesis 6:22, "*This did Noah according to all that God commanded him.*" His salvation was "*by faith.*" (Hebrews 11:7).

Abraham received grace from God. God extended great promises to this man, such as making him the father of a great nation, giving his descendants a land of their own, blessing those

that blessed him and cursing those that cursed him, making his descendants as numerous as the sands of the sea, and most of all, through his seed would all the families of the earth be blessed, and Paul identified that seed as Christ (Galatians 3:16).

The Scriptures teach that Abraham believed God and his *“faith wrought with his works,”* (James 2:22). Faith in God and obedience to God was the way that Abraham benefited from the grace of God extended him. Can there be any question that grace, faith, and obedience all existed under the Patriarchal system?

Under Moses

The same is true under the Mosaic system. Deliverance from Egyptian bondage was the result of an unmerited favor from God on Israel. He was not forced to grant them this deliverance. God graciously sent Moses to be the one through whom this deliverance would be accomplished. But Moses, and the Israelites, had to believe and obey God. If they had not crossed the Red Sea when commanded to do so, they would have perished. Grace, faith, and obedience were all present at that time.

And what shall we say of the healing of Naaman? Did Naaman deserve restoration of health, or was it all by the unearned blessing God gave him? (First Kings 5). But grace alone did not accomplish the return to health. It also required Naaman's faith and obedience. Not until he believed in the cure the prophet commanded, and did what the prophet said, was his flesh restored as that of a little child. Again, we see grace, faith, and obedience working side by side to the benefit of man and the glory of God.

Under Christ

Friend, these same principles are evident in the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Those of Pentecost had been those who called for the murder of the Son of God. They were rightfully accused of His death. If they had received what they deserved, they all would have perished. But God extended grace unto them. He offered them, through the preaching of forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ, salvation. They heard the Word, and coupled that hearing about God's gracious provisions by believing the message of the gospel and obeying the commands given. Grace,

plus faith, plus obedience, brought them to salvation.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was the same process. Paul said he was what he was *“by the grace of God.”* (First Corinthians 15:10). He taught his brethren that they were saved *“by grace.”* (Ephesians 2:8). But not by grace alone was he or any other ever saved. We have access into this grace *“by faith.”* (Romans 5:2). And what kind of faith brought them into the grace of God? It was a faith that obeyed. Paul repeatedly spoke of the *“obedience of faith”* (Romans 1:5; 16:25). Paul obeyed what he was commanded to do. *“Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins calling on the name of the Lord.”* Acts 22:16). Unless he had believed what he heard and obeyed what he was taught, the grace of God would not have saved him.

They Still Abide

So it is with us today. God does not ask the same specifics of you and me that He did of the Patriarchs and Jews. But He deals with us through grace, faith, and obedience.

By the grace of God, God sent His Son into this world to live perfectly, and die on the cross, to be raised from the dead to provide the plan of salvation by His blood. The grace of God offers the sin-cleansing blood of Christ. Man comes into contact with this saving blood by a faith that obeys God’s commands that are found in the *“law of faith.”* (Romans 3:27). That law calls for repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ.

The very fact that God has dealt with man through these same basic principles in every age is evidence that we serve the same God of Abraham, Moses, and the early church.

† † † † †

WITH THE ACQUISITION of a small computer, I now have a much better method of addressing the booklet. It should look better also. The marvels of a computer amaze me. I do not try to understand it; I just enjoy it tremendously. **JWB**

Condemned By The Wicked

On the surface the sermon title seems to express somewhat of a contradiction. It seems most inappropriate for those who are wicked to be condemning anything or anybody. Instead, they should be repenting of their sins rather than correcting or condemning someone else. The error of those who are sinful passing judgment on others is set forth quite clearly in Romans 2:1-3. *“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?”* In this passage Paul had reference to the Jews who condemned the Gentiles but were guilty of the same transgressions themselves. The principle is very applicable to all.

Begin At Self

Christ encourages us to get ourselves right first before we try to help others overcome their faults. *“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. Any why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then thou shall see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”* (Matthew 7:1-5). Christ is not demanding absolute perfection from anyone before he can assist in correcting another. Some have taken His words to mean that. If that were true, then all of the Lord’s teaching of correction would be meaningless because absolute perfection is not attainable in this life. The emphasis is upon self-examination and consideration of our own sins as well as the sins of others. We are to remove our own faults as well as be helpful to others. We also must remember, wherever we study Matthew 7:1-5, that there is a difference between making judgments by our own standards and

respecting and abiding by the judgments of God's standards. The former is forbidden while the second is an obligation.

Even so, Christ warned against the possibility that those who were evil could and would justly condemn others for their sins and evil behavior. Luke 11:29-32, *"And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation, they seek a sign, and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them. For she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."*

Know The Context

Let us understand the background of these words of our Lord. The multitudes had gathered to hear Jesus preach. But He did not speak so as to tickle their ears with conscience soothing phrases. It was characteristic of the preaching of Jesus that His words were often condemning, convicting, and very much to the point. Many considered Him a "hard" preacher. He was not rude nor abusive, but He did not avoid arousing His hearers so they would come out of their sin. By this time, Jesus, His messengers, and their message, had been heard, but rejected by many, probably by most. He and His had been abused, scorned, ridiculed, mocked, criticized. But He warns His hearers of their eventual disaster and doom by comparing them unfavorably with some Old Testament characters and situations wherein there was wickedness and evil. In the comparison, His hearers did not look so good.

The Queen

He mentioned the queen of the south. This referred to the Queen of Sheba, of whom we read in First Kings, chapter ten, and her visit to Solomon. She was a worshipper of idols, one whose reputation is that of laxity in morals, certainly not an admirable person according to God's standards. She had heard of Solomon's wealth and wisdom. She came to see and hear for

herself. The evidence convinced her of his greatness. She said, *"The half was not told me."* Things were greater than she had even been led to imagine.

But should she be the judge of those who were listening to Jesus, she could justly condemn them because of their stubbornness and unwillingness to accept the truth and the evidence that Christ was God's Son. The line of reasoning was, "If the queen of Sheba accepted the greatness of Solomon on the evidence presented, how much more should Jesus Christ have been accepted on the evidence presented." There was more reason to accept Christ than there was for the queen to be impressed with Solomon. With all the signs, wonders, miracles, fulfillment of prophecy and His words, they should not have rejected Him.

The Ninevites

Jesus mentions another, the Ninevites. Nineveh was one of the great Old Testament cities. It was a Gentile city, not populated by God's *"chosen people."* The city would naturally be looked down upon by the Jews. Its population was one of idol worshippers. They were a sinful people. God sent Jonah to cry out against the wickedness of that city and foretell of its impending destruction because of its wickedness.

But though they were exceedingly wicked, they were not as bad as were the ones to whom Jesus was speaking. Should the Ninevites be the judges of the hearers of Jesus, the hearers would be condemned and justly so. A greater than Jonah was in their midst. There was a greater message. Jonah preached destruction but Christ preached the opportunity to repent and be saved. There was more reason to obey the preaching of Jesus than there had been for the Ninevites to repent at the preaching of Jonah. Yet, they repented while the hearers of Jesus would not.

Cities In Jesus' Day

Similar warnings are recorded in Matthew 11:20-24. *"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I*

say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. For if the mighty works, which had been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

Chorazin and Bethsaida were cities where Jesus had performed mighty works. He had fed the 5,000, healed many, and His fame was spread abroad. The people of these cities had every proof that Jesus was who He claimed to be, the Son of God. He contrasted His hearers with the cities of Tyre and Sidon, ancient Gentile cities which His hearers hated. Once these cities were very friendly with the Israelites, but later there was great animosity and unfriendliness between them. The people of Tyre and Sidon celebrated the captivity of Israel and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, the humiliation of God's people. This caused the Lord through Isaiah and Ezekiel to forecast their eventual doom and destruction.

Even so, as dreadfully wicked as those people had been and deserving of God's wrath, the hearers of Jesus in Chorazin and Bethsaida were more deserving of it because they rejected God's Savior of man.

What opportunities the city of Capernaum had! If there was anything that might be called the "headquarters" of Jesus during His personal ministry, Capernaum would come closer to qualifying than most any other place. He stayed there often. He healed one of palsy, healed the nobleman's son, taken money for tribute from the mouth of a fish there, had taught in the synagogue, and many other public and private acts. In contrast the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plains in Abraham's time, had been so wicked that God destroyed them from off the face of the earth to such an extent the exact location of those places has not yet been determined. Sodom was the home of Lot and his family. Sins are named after this city. In spite of the efforts of Abraham to mediate on their behalf, there was not found ten righteous souls in those areas that justified the salvation of them. They were destroyed with fire and brimstone.

Jesus was saying to the people something like this, "If people of Sodom and Gomorrah had the same chance you now have to do right, even as wicked as they were, they would have been spared destruction because they would have believed and changed." This is a very sharp indictment of His hearers. You

will have to search a long while to find anything as stern and condemning as this evaluation that Jesus made of those who were rejecting His words. Indeed, they could be condemned by the wicked.

What Of Us?

But, could those also condemn us? I speak not only of the queen of Sheba, the people of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Morrah, and Nineveh. Could even the hearers of Jesus in Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, also stand in judgment of us and condemn us?

As for those who reject the message of Christ, regardless of who they are, Jesus said, *“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.”*

No people who have ever lived have had more favorable opportunities to serve God than we have. We have the ability to read, know, understand, and living in a land of freedom to practice our convictions without interference. We have such easy access to God’s revelation, church buildings, teachers. Furthermore, we have the entire story of salvation before us that even those in earlier days did not have. We have the inspired record of the prophecies and their fulfillment. We have more light than did they. We have the full, complete, all-sufficient Word of God. We have many encouraging us to follow the way of truth.

Will it be, could it be, that those vile characters of old will be counted better than we because we have rejected the truth? Could they say to us, “We would have been Christians if we had opportunities like you presently have.” Could they cry out, “Our hearts were black and hard, but not as much as yours. We would not have to have been begged and pushed and urged had we the chance you have. We were not acceptable before God, but you are even beneath us.”

Heed God’s Warning

Paul wrote, *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”* (Hebrews 2:3). The answer is, “We won’t escape. We shall be forever lost.” I say to you, from wherever or

whenever one leaves the walks of this life, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But these United States are a most fearful place from which to go and face the Judge of our souls. Where goes the opportunity goes the responsibility. The opportunity is real and cannot be denied. The responsibility to come to Christ is no less evident. To turn away is to seal our condemnation and to place ourselves in the unenviable position of even being condemned by the wicked.

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From Saul To Paul

When we refer to Saul, or Paul, we are referring in this lesson to the same person. The man was known by both names. In his early life, he was Saul of Tarsus, a tentmaker and a very zealous and devout Jew. Later in life he is known as Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. Physically he was the same man, but spiritually and inwardly there was a difference.

Meet The Man

The first mention of this man is in Acts 7:57,58. *“Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city and stoned him, and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.”* This was at the time when Stephen was being stoned by those who hated him and the gospel he had preached to them. Saul was in agreement with what was taking place and watched over the garments of those who did the actual stoning of this Christian. *“And Saul was consenting unto his death.”* (Acts 8:1).

It surely takes a man that is capable of cruelty, hate, violence and bitterness to be so void of compassion as to consent to such illegal and immoral conduct as was manifested that day toward a helpless and outnumbered servant of God. Yes, the first mention of Saul was a time when he was an enemy of God, even though he considered himself God’s friend. He was a Satanic influence and power against the very cause for which the Son of God had given His all. *“As for Saul, he made havoc*

of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.” (Acts 8:3). “My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee...I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.” (Acts 26:4,5; 9-11). Paul admitted, “I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious.” (First Timothy 1:13). “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past on the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it, and profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” (Galatians 1:13,14). Words almost fail to adequately describe the wickedness, viciousness, corruptness of a person like Saul of Tarsus regarding the faith of Christ. He also said of himself that he was the chiefest of sinners (First Timothy 1:15).

Meet A Changed Man

But the man Paul was very different. Listen to him in Acts 26:22,23. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to great and small, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.” This man Paul suffered much for the cause of Christ. “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? [I speak as a fool] I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by

the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” (Second Corinthians 11:22-28).

Paul was almost alone in his final years. He wrote, *“This thou knowest that all that are in Asia turned away from me...”* (Second Timothy 1:15). But still he faced death with assurance and comfort. *“For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.”* (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

At the close of Paul's life, his attitude toward those who forsook him was much like that which Stephen had. Stephen prayed, *“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”* (Acts 7:60). Paul wrote, *“May it not be laid to their account.”* (First Timothy 4:16). His attitude toward the hardships he was called upon to suffer was, *“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.”* (Philippians 1:12). This man who had once consented unto the death of the saints with violence and hatred later was used by the Holy Spirit to pen some of the most brotherly and compassionate words to his brethren one can read. Once he cried for the superiority of the Jews. But later he wrote, *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”* (Galatians 3:27-29). He wrote that God is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11). We cannot avoid being stricken with the immense change that took place in this man, once called Saul, and later Paul.

What Did It?

What caused that change? How did it come about? The Bible tells us. Saul was on his way to Damascus with the mission of expanding his persecution of Christians. Because of the length

of the passage, let me urge the reader to let Paul tell you in his own inspired words what happened, and then return to reading this sermon. Get your Bible and read Acts 22:6-16. This is one of three accounts of the conversion of Saul.

Now having read Paul's words, let us be aware that Saul had known about the Christ for a long time. He had been opposing Christians. Now he hears the voice of the Lord. It was the words from the Lord that convinced him that Jesus was who He claimed to be. On this road, further instructions were given to him to go into Damascus. There a man named Ananias told him what he was to do. He was to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). This penitent man, unable to eat and drink for three days, obeyed what he was commanded to do.

The Gospel Power

Let us hear Paul again tell us about the power that causes the kind of change that took place in his life. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* (Romans 1:16). *"For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12). Just as a surgeon's knife separates diseased tissue from the good and healthy, so the word of God separates sin from the soul. What is that power? It is the gospel, the word of God. Jesus said, *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). He further said, *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). It is the word of God that sets man free from his sins and grants him salvation. It is the word of God that causes one to cease the life of sin and become as God would have him to be.

The change from Saul to Paul, from persecutor to preacher, is but one example of conversion of which we read in Acts and other places. Consider Matthew, the tax-collector who became an inspired writer of Scripture. Or consider Peter who went from a fisherman to a fisher of men. What of the Jews that were so hate-ridden that they called for the death of the Son of God, but later came by the thousands to obey the gospel commands and be added to His church. All heard the word, believed the word, and obeyed the word.

When I was very young and attended college, I remember meeting an older student who once had been a part of Hitler's armed forces of Germany. After the war, he returned to his home in Frankfort with no job, no food, no family, nothing but the disgrace of defeat. He was found by Otis Gatewood, one of our brethren who had entered Germany as a missionary. Brother Gatewood was the first American to enter the nation as a missionary after the war. He took this once proud German who was sick and in poverty, nurtured him physically and taught him spiritually and converted him to Christ. The man came to this country to learn how to preach the gospel, has since returned to Germany, and the last I ever heard of him, was preaching the gospel in Germany. What caused that change in that man? It was the word of God, taught and practiced.

Changes Are Still Being Made

The good news to you and me, indeed, to all mankind, is that the word of God still accomplishes the same beneficent things for anyone who will come to Christ according to its teaching. The "*word liveth and abideth forever,*" Peter said. (First Peter 1:25). It is still God's power unto salvation. It can change the present from what we are into what we ought to be. That being true, is it not strange how many will resist to the death the influence of the gospel in their lives? Some are satisfied to remain in their sins. Some are deceived into thinking that physical welfare means spiritual welfare and do not wish to consider Christ at all.

What spiritual change do you really need? Many have been touched by the influence of the gospel before you. Do you wish to be more faithful as a servant of the Lord? Are there unbecoming habits that you need to abandon? Would you have more love in your heart for others? Do you desire to be a better example of Christlikeness to those around you? Have you ever brought your life into harmony with God at all? How else can you lay hold on the promise of eternal life as long as you keep yourself separate from the only source of life, which is Jesus Christ?

Through The Sufficient Word

Friend, the way to accomplish what is needed is by and through the revealed Word of God. The same gospel that

changed Saul of Tarsus will change you, if only you will do as he did; namely, believe and obey. Think of what Saul was and what he became. Think of what you are and what God wants you to become. The Word of God is the answer to your most urgent spiritual welfare. Believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, and obey His command to be baptized in water for the remission of sins. Then spend your life adding to your knowledge of the word, practicing what you learn in daily life. Let your prayer be as the song suggest: "Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee."

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TO THE READERS

Over the past few weeks we have been updating the mailing list for our booklet, **A BURNING FIRE**. You responded upon request to return the cards and notices that you desired to receive it as you have been doing. The response was very gratifying to me, especially to know that so many are benefiting from it, and passing it to others that they might profit to whatever degree they can from it.

Not only am I thankful for the splendid cooperation from those who have receiving the booklet, but many sent words of encouragement . This warmed my heart and spurs me forward. I do plan to produce this booklet as long as health, finances, and a reasonable degree of intellect abides with me. I am constantly producing more and more manuscripts from my outlines. Altogether, I should have enough material to carry me for another fifteen or more years. I will be as old as some of my friends by that time. So many have been so gracious in your comments and I want you to know I realize your exaggeration but appreciate it abundantly.

And "THANKS" to those who even sent contributions to assist in the costs of producing it. You are very thoughtful and considerate. I never want to cahrge for the booklet, and the way some of you have seen fit to help me, I feel sure I will be able to manage it in the future as I have in the past. "Nip and tuck" has been the procedure, and so far, it works.

May God's tenderest blessings continue with us all. **JWB**

CHURCH FINANCES

This subject may be considered among some of the more neglected subjects on which there is adequate teaching in the Scriptures. Many preachers fail to preach on it as often as it is needed because some impugn their motives everytime there is a sermon on giving. They accuse the preacher of seeking personal gain, interested only in money, etc. Since the financial affairs of the church are overseen and handled by others, there is no cause to assume such motives when this subject is discussed.

It is not a popular subject with many because they are covetous and stingy. They resist the truth because it cuts into their use of money for their own selfish aims and ambitions. But if one really wants to know how to please God in the matter of giving, then he will welcome every opportunity to give this subject a thorough study. Preaching on giving is not merely a "plea for money." It is an effort to influence the heart and provoke people to learn what God wants.

A Study In Sacrifice

Church finances are inseparable from the study of sacrifices. Christianity is built and maintained by sacrifices. God gave, Christ gave, we give. *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor. that ye through his poverty might be rich."* (Second Corinthians 8:9). *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* (Luke 9:23). It is never asking "too much" to ask a Christian to sacrifice for the cause of Christ. So much of the finances of the church are provided from "leftovers." We ought not sacrifice our giving to the Lord so we can have other things. If anything, it must be the other way around.

Follow God's Way

Men have devised many ways to "raise money" for their religious activities. They conduct bazaars, suppers, raffles, shows, operate businesses and any number of other ways of gaining funds for "church" work. In such things, people become merely spenders, not givers. God's plan for finances of the

church is given in First Corinthians 16:2. *“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, that there be no gatherings when I come.”* This tells when, who, how, and how much, along with Second Corinthians 9:6,7. *“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.”* Did not Christ teach, *“It is more blessed to give than receive?”* (Acts 20:15).

We have had it asked of us, “How can you plan the expenditures for the church when you do not have any control over your members about giving?” Some have inquired, “Don’t you have some system of assessment? Don’t you send regular statements? Don’t you have special fund-raising programs?” The answer to such questions reflects a lack of confidence in the Lord’s plan. It is true that some may take advantage of the Lord’s plan and not give as they ought. But God controls through the conversion of the heart, and not through statements, harassments, schemes, and such like.

We Give Regularly

We are to give upon the first day of the week. This is so logical, inasmuch as Christians meet for worship on that day to observe the Lord’s Supper as well. Unlike the Lord’s Supper, we are not prohibited from giving at other times because we have the teaching, *“Let us do good unto all men,”* which is prefaced by the phrase, *“as we have therefore opportunity.”* (Galatians 6:10). But there is strength in regularity of giving just as there is strength in regularity of assembling and engaging in the other items of worship to God. There is actually nothing wrong with taking a contribution every time we meet, if it be necessary. It might leave the impression that money is the main thing. And if one had given as he should have given earlier he will not be giving later. But this falls under the heading of using good judgment and still giving opportunity to give as giving ought to be done. Contributions are often taken other than at the first day of the week assemblies when the need demands it. There is no wrong in that, but it is not always expedient.

All Are Involved

Who is to give? The Scripture says *“every one of you...”* Every Christian is expected to be involved in giving. Now this does not demand that each one must necessarily, actually, and literally place something in the collection basket as it is circulated among the worshippers. A man and his wife may both be giving even though only one of them writes the check and places it in the basket. But both are giving. Both are involved. Both should know and be included in determining the matter. We recognize that when a man pays the utility bill, the whole family is paying the utility bill. So it is when just one member of the family does the actual placing of the money into the collection.

When both a man and his wife are earning money, their entire income should be considered when determining their giving. It is not unknown that the income earned by many wives is totally ignored when it comes to the amount to be given.

One has asked, “What if you cannot give?” We have never known when such was the case. Consider the widow’s mite of Luke 21. She never came to the place where she felt she could not give. It has been known of people borrowing to give. They borrow for just about anything else that they want.

The Sinner’s Gift

Shall we accept gifts from non-Christians? I know of no specific teaching on that subject. One has suggested that we need to accept it and let the Lord get use of it for a while since the devil had used it long enough. We might needlessly offend someone if it was refused. Furthermore, is it not right to use whatever you have opportunity to use for the cause of Christ unless some divine law is violated? I know of no reason not to accept money from non-Christians if they want to give. We ought not solicit money from them because the Lord’s plan calls for His people to finance His work through their giving. But money is just money and it will spend regardless of the person giving it. I would not doubt that money given by some members may be as “stained” as money received from some other source sometimes.

“How” And “How Much”

People often concern themselves with “how much to give.” It has been my experience that if we would concentrate more on “how to give the “how much” will naturally follow and be as it

ought to be. Paul commended the brethren of Macedonia in their giving because they “*first gave their own selves to the Lord.*” (Second Corinthians 8:5). When a person has given himself to God, he will not withhold his money from the financing of the work of the church. The Christian faith is a very personal matter and nobody can do your part in giving for you anymore than one can partake of the Lord’s Supper for you. Giving is a personal matter. God does not leave it to others to determine “how much” anyone gives. Even God has not set any specified percentage, as was the case in the Old Testament. The Jews tithed, and some have calculated that throughout the year they gave as much as one third of their prosperity into the treasury of the Lord. We are to give liberally, cheerfully, bountifully, and through love. Giving is a test of love. It is a matter where each one much examine himself. It may be worthwhile in comparing what we give for the church with what we do in other activities. We may see why we have suggested that many times the church is financed with “left-overs.”

Questions

Let us consider some of the questions raised about church finances, some of which involve human judgment. Who is to oversee the distribution of the funds of the church? The eldership has the oversight of the congregation (First Peter 5:2), and this includes the finances.

Shall We Pledge

Is it right to “pledge”? If we purpose in our giving as we are commanded to do, we are pledging. Now, whether we tell someone else, like the elders, what we have purposed or not is another matter. It is my judgment that giving should be kept private. There is a way of accomplishing the advantages and benefits of “pledging” without invading privacy if desired. It is an advantage to the eldership to have some real concept of how much to anticipate as they plan the expenditures. Pledging helps them along that line. But this can be done with anonymous revelation of intentions. This is what I recommend, if such an approach is to be used at all. Asking people to sit down and write out what they intend to do will usually provoke some serious study by some who otherwise would never do it. We make promises and pledges to others for everything we buy on

credit and sign our names. Surely, there ought not be any objection to revealing our intentions if we are not required to make known just who intends what. Purposing is a command whether you call it pledging or whatever.

Considering Some Expediences

Can a church have a treasurer? Some have considered the treasurer to be an addition to the “officers” of the church. But a treasurer is simply one who has the care of the funds. He is not like an elder or deacon. In fact, he may or may not be either one. But he is simply one who is assigned the work of caring for the money records just as another may be assigned to care for the baptismal garments. He does not oversee the distribution of those funds. The eldership does that. He merely keeps good records of what is done and does the necessary physical labor involved in attending to such things.

Budget

Should a church have a budget? It is a matter of judgment, and I certainly think good business practices apply in handling the funds of the church. A budget is nothing more than financial goals and plans. It is not set in concrete. Some brethren have turned down opportunities to help in worthy efforts because “it is not in the budget.” The budget is not the law of the Medes and Persians. It can be changed if necessary. One congregation with which I labored changed its budget three times during the year because opportunities arose for which some accommodations were made. Budgets are good ways of planning a year’s work, but they are not to be considered inflexible.

“Special”

Should there ever be “special” contributions? If everyone gave as they ought each week, would there ever be a need for it? Yes, even if everyone gave as they ought, there might arise needs that would justify a “special” contribution. Opportunities and emergencies arise that could not be anticipated. Sacrifice has not floor level in it. Whether to have a “special” contribution ought to be over, above, and beyond the regular one or all you are doing is gathering what ought to have been given already. But some situations may call for greater sacrifice and a “special”

contribution may be permitted. *“As we have opportunity...”* seems to govern this.

Matter of Oversight

Should there be more than one treasury? Some places have treasuries in Bible classes. The eldership is to have the oversight of the affairs of the congregation and there ought not be situations where others are governing the distribution of contributions. If some wish to make up a fund in a class, let it be given into the regular treasury under the oversight of the eldership, and not have separate accounts under the oversight

Reports

Should there be a financial report to all members? This is nothing but good sense and good judgment. It is for the protection of those who handle the money for the church as well as a source of information and encouragement for the membership.

Is it anybody's business what I give? Yes, it is the Lord's business. We have an obligation to other brethren to carry our share of the load when we are in fellowship in such things. We may not have to report to other men what we do, but God knows. We have to live with ourselves and our own conscience as well.

A Matter Of The Heart

When we have the right attitude toward money, the church, other brethren, God's work, our personal stewardship, and respect for His Word, giving will not be near the problem that it has become to many. First, give yourself to God, then the rest will come.

† † † † †

“The best way to break a bad habit is to drop it.”

NOT WITH OBSERVATION

“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” (Luke 17:20). The Pharisees had demanded of Jesus when the kingdom of God should come. This is the answer Jesus gave. Just what is meant by what He said?

Already John the Baptist, Jesus, the twelve and the seventy had been preaching among the people that the kingdom was *“at hand”* (Mark 1:15). Jesus had said it would come in the lifetime of some of those to whom He spoke (Mark 9:1). Before these had been the prophets who foretold its coming (Isaiah 2:1,2; Micah 4:1,2; Daniel 2:14; 7:13,14; and other passages). The Pharisees were right in expecting the coming of the kingdom.

Do the words of Jesus indicate that there would be no way for men to know when the kingdom had come? Does He mean that there would be nothing observable that would designate its existence? Indeed not! Many signs had been related through the ages with specificity regarding events that would denote the coming of the kingdom, including the outpouring of power, specified as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8). By seeing the occurrence of the matters prophesied we can know exactly when the Lord’s kingdom was established.

Linguistic scholars inform us that the terms translated *“not with observation”* have not only to do with that which can be seen by the eye, but related to some visible manifestation like the falling of stars or something similar. It is an astronomical expression. Such was not the nature of the kingdom or its coming.

Jesus proceeded to teach the spiritual nature of the kingdom by saying, *“The kingdom of God is within you.”* (Verse 21).

Some have suggested the term *“observation”* might be a medical term being used by the physician (Luke) that conveys the idea of taking note of symptoms. This means the kingdom would be *“observable”* only as the manifestations of the righteous inward man might be seen in the lives of those that made up its citizenry.

God did not promise to set off an array of heavenly fireworks with the coming of the kingdom. Such would not announce its beginning. Its presence would be most noticeable, however, as people lived in the imitation of Christ and could be observed in their manner of life.

JWB

THE BEATITUDES AND THE KINGDOM

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5,6,7), including the Beatitudes (5:12), must be understood in the context of its presentation. Matthew 4:23 speaks of Jesus going about "*preaching the gospel of the kingdom.*" At the conclusion of the sermon we have the specific designation that the sermon was "*his doctrine.*" The sermon is as a preamble to the new covenant or testament of Christ. The old was soon to be displaced by being fulfilled and the new would become effective. The entire sermon is prospective in nature, contemplating the new kingdom that would begin on Pentecost.

While there are unquestionably certain ethical values in the Beatitudes, each one is correctly recognized as a gospel principle; a preview of the kingdom that was soon to come.

The poor in spirit refers to what a man is; one who recognizes his dependence on God; destitute of pride and self-sufficiency.

Those that mourn do so because of their grief over sin; their own sin as well as that of others. In the kingdom would be comfort. The meek are not to be confused with being passive, timid or inferior. The basic element of meekness is inner-mastery, self-control, possession of one's faculties and temper. To inherit the earth is but a forecast of the spread of the gospel of the kingdom throughout the world.

The righteousness for which we are to hunger and thirst refers to the system, laws, commandments of God (Psalm 119:172; Romans 1:16, 17; 10:3). The satisfaction of that spiritual appetite will be in the kingdom.

The merciful are the forgiving, even as God is merciful and forgiving. Pure in heart is purity of understanding. They shall see, rather than be double-minded (James 4:8).

The peacemakers are not merely those who settle disputes among men, but those who lead others to make peace with God by being reconciled through Christ.

The persecuted are those who encounter opposition, being buffeted by hostile forces for the kingdom's sake. Even in the midst of railings against them their reward is assured.

We will come to a more perfect knowledge of this matchless sermon when we view it in the light of the characteristics of the kingdom, which is the church. The Beatitudes are forecasts of the nature of the new kingdom of Christ and the quality of those who compose it.

JWB

Did They Know Of The Soul?

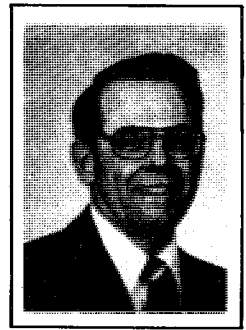
Matthew 16:26, "For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

The New American Bible translates it, "What profit would a man show if he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process?" Justification for this paraphrase is argued on the basis that the ancient Israelites did not know we have a soul. Is this accurate?

Moses spoke of man as a soul (Genesis 2:7). Solomon spoke of the "spirit" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Hebrews eleven implies the awareness of immortality of man was even understood by Abraham (verse 10). David knew of the continuation of a person's existence after this life (Second Samuel 12:23).

True enough, the Sadducees denied this element of the nature of man (Matthew 22:28; Acts 23:8). But they were reprimanded for their position (Matthew 22:29).

The ancient Hebrews knew of the nature of man that included the soul or spirit. But perverters seek excuses for making changes.



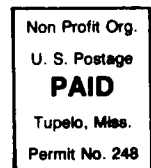
JAMES W. BOYD

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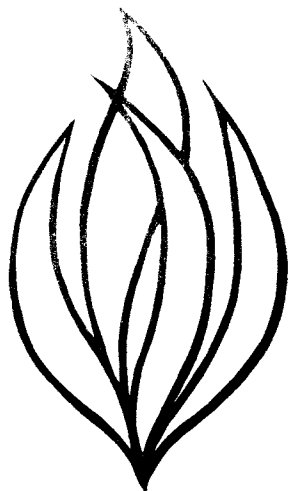
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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A Burning Fire



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



THIS ISSUE

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Sanctification

The word “sanctification” is a Biblical word that conveys to us a doctrine found in the Old and New Testament. Because it occupies a prominent place in the teaching of the Bible, we need to have a good understanding of it. While we shall not exhaust the subject in this one lesson, we do believe we can consider a sufficient amount so that we can have the proper understanding of the term as well as be able to see the falsity of much that is being taught about sanctification. Because of the error being taught, the term conjures confusion and there is much mysticism surrounding it.

In this lesson we want to present some illustrations of sanctification, note how sanctification takes place, and learn its true meaning.

What It Is Not

It is quite popular to consider sanctification as something very sensational that appeals to high emotions. It is widely held by some religious groups that sanctification means some kind of instantaneous and personal holiness that makes one sinlessly perfect. It is supposed to be some direct operational gift that comes from the Holy Spirit. It is even supposed to cause a person to lose the capacity to sin. He no longer has any desire to sin and is beyond the reach of temptation because he is now sanctified. This kind of doctrine regarding sanctification gives a person a great sense of security, removes all fear of the devil, and one enjoys a state of bliss that nothing can cause him to be lost ever again. It all comes about, according to this teaching, as a second measure of grace that is miraculously and mysteriously provided.

But the Bible does not show sanctification to include such things as mentioned above. Sanctification is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, even though those who were baptized of the Holy Spirit were sanctified. It is true that they were sanctified in one sense by virtue of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but sanctification occurs without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We shall have occasion to refer to this again.

There is only one record of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and that was on the first Pentecost after the resurrection and

ascension of Christ. I realize that many contend that the household of Cornelius was baptized of the Holy Spirit, and there is no question but there was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon them, enabling them to speak in languages they had not learned, whereby it was proven to the visiting Jewish brethren that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. But we would contend that the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was only given to the apostles, only came upon the apostles, and only the apostles were endued with the power of inspired men in such fashion. Even those who believe the household of Cornelius was baptized of the Holy Spirit agree that the purpose for the operation of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost differed from that at Caesarea. But John, chapters 14, 15, 16, explains the purposes for the coming of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised, and that applied to the apostles. But this is another subject. Suffice it here to say that sanctification is not something necessarily attached to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There were people, places, and things of the Old Testament that were sanctified long before anyone was baptized of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere is there evidence that sanctification demands some miraculous, mysterious event.

False Doctrines

The false doctrines surrounding sanctification appeal to feelings. So many rely upon how they feel to determine whether they are saved or lost, right with God or not, right or wrong about a matter. But surely, informed people realize that feelings are not a source of reliable evidence. One feels good when he thinks all is well, but feeling good does not prove all is well.

Nor is there any evidence that being sanctified means that one no longer has the capacity to sin and is beyond temptation. If there is any emphasis in the New Testament to the Christian it is the emphasis of the danger of sinning and falling away. Every New Testament book contains that warning in some form or another. Sanctified people are not immune from the deceits and wiles of the devil.

What It Means

To “sanctify” something, or someone, simple means to set it apart. One is sanctified when he is set apart from the rest. It is the same idea as being made “holy.” That which is holy is

sanctified, set apart. The person who becomes a Christian is a sanctified person because he has been set apart from his sins, set apart from the world, set apart into the right relationship with God by being washed clean of his sins by the blood of Jesus Christ when he obeyed the gospel. A saint is a person who is sanctified. For this reason, Paul called the Christians in Corinth “*saints*.” (First Corinthians 1:2). To further understand this meaning of being “set apart” as the meaning of sanctification, let us look at some things said to be sanctified in the Old Testament.

God sanctified the seventh day. “*And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.*” (Genesis 2:3). That day was set apart from the other days, for special use and observance that became evident when God gave the Israelites the law of Moses on Sinai. (Exodus 8-11). There were other days that were sanctified under that old and former law, such as the various feast days: Passover, Pentecost, etc.

The firstborn of both man and beast was to be sanctified. “*And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast; it is mine.*” (Exodus 13:1). Sanctification does not mean without sin. Animals have no sin. A newborn child has no sin. To be sanctified means “set apart” and in this case, set apart unto God.

Even a mountain was said to be sanctified. “*And Moses said unto the Lord, the people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.*” (Exodus 19:23). This was the mount where Moses was to meet God and receive the law. None were to go near it, man nor animal, lest they die. It was set apart from the rest.

The tabernacle and the priesthood were sanctified (Exodus 29:44). For this reason the temple as well was called a “*sanctuary*.” It was a place of worship, where sacrifices were offered, where daily services were rendered, made holy by the special presence of the Lord, set apart for this sacred work. The building itself was a holy place. Those who served therein were also set apart with special duties and ceremonies for that work. They were sanctified.

Also, there were vessels, altars, and many other things that were said to be sanctified. Surely these inanimate objects were not in sin, were not subject to sin, were not tempted, were not relieved of any capacity to sin. Sanctification implies no such thing.

Jesus Was Sanctified

Even the sinless and perfect Jesus was said to be sanctified. John 10:36, "...*Father sanctified him and sent him into the world.*" Jesus was subject to temptation (Matthew 4), yet He was sanctified. He never sinned but had the capacity to sin. Sanctification did not provide Him with that perfection. He was set apart for a certain work and purpose; providing salvation for all mankind.

The apostles were sanctified. Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify them (John 17:17). They were set apart for the work that was peculiar to an apostle. They were baptized of the Holy Spirit which was part of their qualification and equipment for doing their apostolic work. They were left in charge of spreading the gospel to the world.

Every Christian is sanctified. There is no such thing as some Christians being sanctified and others not. Christians are to be different. They are a peculiar people (Titus 2:14). They are distinctive from the rest of the world. They are in the world but not of the world. They are the "*called out,*" set apart by having come to Christ.

Certainly the Corinthian letters, addressed to "*Saints,*" shows that being sanctified does not mean sinlessness, because the church at Corinth was beset with all manner of sins among them, even fornication, division, contentions, going to law against each other, carnality, misuse of the Lord's Supper, etc. John once wrote to Christians and said, "*If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" (First John 1:8). How presumptuous one is when he declares himself to be sinlessly perfect and immune from temptation!

Again, Christ is said to be sanctified in First Peter 3:15. Now get

Again, Christ is said to be sanctified in First Peter 3:15. We are told to "*sanctify the Lord God in your hearts...*" We are to sanctify God. What does this mean? It means we set God apart in our love, loyalty, devotion, above all else. He assumes a place of special importance to us as we acknowledge Him.

By The Word

People are said to be sanctified by the Word of God. Jesus prayed to the Father regarding the apostles, "*Sanctify them by*

thy word.” (John 17:17). Christians are sanctified by the sacrifice of Christ, the death of His body on the cross. *“By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”* (Hebrews 10:10). We are sanctified by being washed clean of our sins. *“That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”* (Ephesians 5:26). Our sanctification comes according to Romans 15:16, by the Holy Spirit. *“That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”* Again, *“But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”* (Second Thessalonians 2:13).

As we hear, believe, and obey the truth of God’s Word that has been provided through the Holy Spirit, we are washed clean by the blood of Christ from our sins and set apart into the service of God as His children. In this way we are sanctified people. We do not cease to be human. We do not become sinlessly perfect without even the capacity any longer to sin. We have not been the recipient of some miraculous operation upon us directly by the Holy Spirit. But as we follow His Word, we are sanctified

Because a Christian is sanctified, a saint, he ought to live in a manner consistent with his sanctified state; namely, *“Soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”* (Titus 2:12).

Sanctified And Saved

Those who are the sanctified are those who are the saved in Christ. They are the Christians. We do not wish to fall victim to false doctrines that would make us think we are something we are not. Nor do we wish to be led astray into thinking a saint is some peculiar person of the long ago that has been elevated to “sainthood” by Romanism. People are sometimes heard to say, in excusing their faults, “Well, after all, I’m no saint.” Well, we had better be, if we want to go to heaven. We do not have to be perfect to go to heaven. We strive toward perfection, but we must rely on the saving and cleansing blood of Christ to remove our sins in order to enter heaven.

Friend, is your life “set apart” into the service of God? Are you a Christian? Have you been washed in the blood of the

lamb? Are you a saint? Let the Word of God persuade you to become one.

† † † † †

Friends With God's Enemies

We read in First Corinthians 15:33, "*Evil companions corrupt good morals.*" This was written by the apostle Paul as he was directed by the Holy Spirit to Christians. They are words that govern the day-to-day manner of life of the Christian with respect to those with whom we associate and those whom we choose to be our friends.

The Lord associated with wicked people while He was here on the earth. He ate with publicans and sinners. He allowed a woman of ill-repute and an evil reputation to wash His feet with tears and dry them with the hair of her head. He discussed the great subject of the water of life with a Samaritan woman who had obviously led a rather loose life. He forgave the woman that was taken in adultery.

His Association With Sinners

Our Lord never associated with the evil people around Him for the purpose of partaking of their evil, but only to use the opportunity He had to condemn their sins, teach them a better way, and encourage them to live more righteously than before. Never did He leave the impression that He condoned sin, but was always seeking to bring people out of sin. He said, "*They that be whole need not a physician but they that are sick.*" He was often among the "sick." He came to seek and save the lost, so He was often found among the lost. He came to the world to save sinners, so it is not surprising that there were times and conditions when He associated with sinners. Even so, we are to follow His example, but at the same time be mindful of Paul's warning, "*Evil companions corrupt good morals.*"

The passage is a warning. We are urged to be cautious in the

choosing of our friends. Everyone has a certain amount of influence. That influence can be good or bad. A Christian can influence others for good, but he can also be influenced by evil. Bad company can ruin more than just one's reputation. It can be the opening for the ruin of one's character. Choosing the wrong kind of friends and associates can produce the wrong kind of life, lead us into temptation and sin, and draw one away from God.

It is not uncommon for one who has become a Christian to not only change many of the habits and activities of his life, but also his circle of friends and associations. He has to leave those with whom he formerly associated and make friends of God's children who share the same goals, the same faith, the same purposes in life. Former friends, continuing to live in sin, can only become a hindrance and drag against him as he strives to be faithful to Christ.

"But I associate with former friends, people out of the Lord, in order to convert them to Christ," some might say. That is certainly a noble purpose and a righteous goal. Indeed, it is a part of the Christian's duty to try to win others to the Lord. But still we must be careful, lest we be converted back to the ways of evil rather than converting them to Christ. We must always be very careful and very sure which way the influence is flowing.

A Different People

People of God have always been a distinct, set-apart, exclusive, peculiar people. This was true in the Old Testament as well as the New. God has shown His displeasure with His own people when His people aligned themselves with those who did not belong to Him. Nine hundred years before Christ, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was invited by Ahab, wicked king of Northern Israel, to go and fight against Syria. Ahab, the worshipper of idols and one who led various efforts against God's prophets, wanted Jehoshaphat for his ally. Jehoshaphat foolishly agreed.

Before the battle with Syria, Jehoshaphat asked that a prophet be consulted. Ahab balked at that, calling only for his false prophets that always said what they knew would please him. But Jehoshaphat wanted a true prophet of God. Reluctantly, Ahab consented and sent for Micaiah, whom Ahab hated, because he did not say things simply to please Ahab. Jehoshaphat should have realized what kind of company he was

keeping and had nothing to do with this anti-Jehovah person.

When they went into battle, Ahab disguised himself so he would not be identified as the king. This caused the Syrians to attack Jehoshaphat, who barely escaped with his life. The armies of Ahab and Jehoshaphat were soundly defeated, Ahab killed, and Jehoshaphat returned home humiliated. He was met by the prophet Jehu who told him, *“Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.”* (Second Chronicles 19:2).

A Cause Of Downfall

It was association with the heathen nations around them that contributed substantially to the downfall of both Israel and Judah. In spite of the Lord’s repeated warnings that they not inter-marry with them, and not make treaties with them, they became more and more entwined with them until their unfaithfulness to God caused their destruction and captivity.

Living in the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah brought great heaviness upon Lot and his family, and also Abraham. Abraham got into serious trouble when he went to Egypt without the Lord’s direction and lied about his wife, Sarah, claiming she was only his sister, in order to escape what he thought would be his death if others wanted Sarah.

Solomon married foreign wives from idolatrous nations. *“But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites, of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clave to these in love...And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.”* (First Kings 11:1-6). It has ever been true that marriages with those who do not belong to God have been a source of weakness and detrimental influence to those who do belong to God. But it is so hard to get people to admit this and realize it until it is too late.

The New Testament bears out the same teaching with the same conclusions regarding Christians and their choice of associates. *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what*

part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (Second Corinthians 6:14-18). While the passage does not forbid all association with the world, for then we must needs go out of the world, it does forbid entrance into any tie, relationship, or association that would cause the Christian to be unfaithful to the Lord whether it be social, recreational, occupational, marital, or whatever. *“Come ye out from among them, saith the Lord.”* The Lord has said it. Too many in the church want to be in the church for the spiritual blessings but are unwilling to leave out the world, sinful activities and associations. They become a reproach against the holy and worthy name of Christ. Historically, this has been one of the ways the devil has sapped the church of its effectiveness and spiritual vitality and influence for good.

A Restricted Fellowship

Christians are not to have religious fellowship with all people. *“Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds.”* (Second John 9-11). Gospel preachers are not members of ministerial associations that include all kind of denominational pastors and clergymen, false teachers of false religions. Such people do not teach the whole counsel of God but are wedded to their creeds and denominations. The Lord’s church is not a part of such things as the National Council of Churches. In addition to being an unscriptural body, that council is a promoter of modernism and error. One must sacrifice the Biblical truths and ignore the doctrine of Christ to fellowship false teachers and false doctrine.

Faithful brethren and faithful churches do not join with sectarians of the denominational world to celebrate such days as Easter, Christmas, etc.

I was once asked to preach on salvation at a rescue mission but was told not to mention baptism. Furthermore, the service was to include instrumental music and testimonials about the direct operation of the Holy Spirit by some of those present. I had to refuse rather than agree to compromise the truth and sacrifice it in order to preach there as was requested.

When living in South Bend, Indiana, I was invited to conduct the daily program of the local council of churches for one week. I accepted on the condition that I could state I was not a part of that council and tell why. It was agreed and I did what I said I was going to do. Needless to say, I was not asked for another time.

Preach, But Not Compromise

Gospel preachers will preach anywhere and anytime, conduct services as they ought to be done anywhere so long as truth can be taught, nothing must be compromised, and no impression left that appears to condone error. But if one cannot preach the truth or oppose the error that needs to be exposed and opposed, he would do better to shake the dust and go elsewhere.

So important is the right choice of associates, Christians cannot even fellowship unfaithful brethren. *"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat."* (First Corinthians 5:9-11). Why this instruction? *"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened."* (First Corinthians 5:6,7). The influence of the unfaithful brother is harmful to the church. There is to be no agreement between those who walk contrary to the truth and the faithful in Christ. A man, woman, boy, girl or church is known by the company it keeps and condones, and what they appear to approve by the behavior it endorses. Even though the need to abstain from the appearance of evil does not fit into the plans of some who are members of the church, and even though the distinctiveness required of a Christian regarding his

manner of life is not what some want, sinful conduct in the church destroys the church. The church is often slandered, criticized, charged with narrow-mindedness and self-righteousness when it is determined to uphold God's truth. It is better to win the ill-favor of evil men than to offend Almighty God and "go along" anyway. James said, "*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*" (James 4:4).

Who Are Enemies?

Are such people as we have mentioned really God's enemies? It is not for me and you to judge. But it is up to me and you to accept the judgments of God, recognize what He has declared, and live by His standards. We are expected to discern between good and evil, and keep apart from that which has the appearance of evil. We are to abhor evil. (First Thessalonians 5:22; Romans 12:9). Proof of friendship with the Lord is the doing of His will. "*Ye are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.*" (John 15:14). Proof of love is obedience to His commands. "*For this is the love of God; that we keep His commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.*" (First John 5:4). Those that shall inherit the eternal kingdom of God in heaven will be those who not only say, but also do, the will of the Lord (Matthew 7:21). Since this is the teaching of the Lord, we shall not be ashamed of it, nor give place to anyone or anything else if we be faithful to Him. We must be like Joshua who said, "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" (Joshua 24:15).

Christians live in a world that is mostly controlled by servants of the devil. Evil, degeneracy, perversion abounds all around us. Because of this situation, the inspired apostle warns, "*Evil companions corrupt good morals.*" While we busy ourselves in seeking the lost souls for the salvation Christ offers, we dare not for a moment forget that there is a difference between the Christian and a non-Christian, nor involve ourselves in any associations, relationships, companionships, activities that lead us away from the Lord and cause us to compromise the faith.

For our own protection and preservation in Christ, for our own spiritual welfare, God, through Paul, warns us about the ties with others that we make.

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The Fall of Jericho

The time of the events under discussion was about forty years after the people of Israel had been delivered from Egyptian bondage. They had been given the law on Mt. Sinai after crossing the Red Sea, and had wandered in the wilderness for these four decades. Now they had experienced the change in leadership from Moses to Joshua, and at his direction crossed the Jordan River on dry land much the same as they did the Red Sea. They now approach their first major obstacle in taking the land of Canaan; namely, the armed, walled, and well fortified city of Jericho.

All Canaan knew the Israelites were coming, *“And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was their spirit in them anymore, because of the children of Israel.”* (Joshua 5:1).

Jericho closed its gates and prepared for the siege. *“Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in.”* (Joshua 6:1).

Please Read The Text

At this point, let us persuade the reader to take his Bible and read the lengthy passage of ‘Joshua 6:1-20, which presents to us the complete account of the fall of Jericho. Space prohibits its inclusion here, but to gain the most from the lesson, please read the Scriptures.

The plan for taking Jericho was certainly unorthodox and unusual as far as military conquests were concerned. No man would have devised such a plan because it would have seemed unreasonable, lacking appeal, illogical, and humiliating to think that anything of this nature would accomplish the desired result. It defied all human reasoning and experience.

The plan obviously came from God and was delivered to Joshua who instructed the people. It was simple even though different. The people were to march around the walls of Jericho one time each day for six days and seven times more on the

seventh day, blow their trumpets, and shout. There is nothing complicated or difficult about this procedure, an unheard of and an unlikely military effort.

No Questions Asked

Joshua and Israel are to be commended for not questioning the wisdom of God nor His plan. No one said, "I don't see how that will do any good." Nobody cried, "What will the people of Canaan think of us when they see us doing this thing?" N obody questioned, "How can marching, blowing and shouting get these great walls down?" They simply accepted God's plan because they believed God. When people believe God, they will accept what God directs. The fact that they question God, as if God's way will not work, shows that they place too much importance on their own thinking and really do not have confidence in God.

Many today would have questioned God and rejected His plan altogether. They never would have obeyed it. It was not glamorous enough. It did not appeal to vanity enough. It did not fit man's intellectual understanding. They would laugh it away and make mockery of it. For these and similar reasons, many today reject God's simple plan for saving man. They just don't see how doing what God says will do any good. They are not satisfied with God's plan and prefer their own. They really just do not have the faith in God that they must have to be saved.

Especially do people reject water baptism like this. Recently on television, in one of the popular programs, *The Waltons*, the father of the clan said, "I don't see how getting yourself all wet is going to do anything for my soul." His trouble, and that in real life as well is the presumption of questioning God's wisdom and plans.

Attempts To "Improve"

God's ways have often proved peculiar and strange, even useless, to some. Men are ever trying to "improve" on God's ways. This is at the base of the existing denominational system. We are taught that His ways are above ours and His wisdom is not limited to our finite wisdom. Man never shows himself more foolish than when he clashes with God and pits his own wisdom against God's. It takes greater faith to do what God says

simply because God said it than it does to do what God says when you think you see some good reason for it. We do not have to agree with “why” God directs anything. But we have to agree to do whatever He teaches us.

The story is told of two sons who were instructed by their father to go to the fields and plant one field with wheat, another with oats, and the third with corn. They went, and when they came to the first field, they agreed it was a good field for wheat and so sowed it. The next field they also considered good for oats and planted oats. But the third field was not good for corn, according to their thinking, so they sowed something other than corn. Now, how many times did they obey the father? The answer is none. Each time they did their own will, not the father’s. And when the father’s will differed from their own, they went their own way. So it is with many today. Even what they appear to be doing in obedience to God is really being done because they happen to think God was right about it that time. When they don’t approve, they forsake His way.

But Joshua and Israel had faith in God, did not doubt, did not question, but obeyed precisely what God told them to do. This was a manifestation of genuine confidence in God.

By Faith

Hebrews 10:30 reads, “*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*” The walls fell “*by faith.*” Faith was the power that made the walls fall. Whose faith? Man’s faith, Israel’s faith, Joshua’s faith. Faith in whom? Faith in God and His Word and promises He had given them. What kind of faith? There are different kinds of faith. We read of weak faith, strong faith, dead faith, little faith. But the faith that caused the walls of Jericho to fall was an obedient faith, a faith that works, that is active, submissive, unreserved, unquestioning, one that is made perfect or complete by obedience.

Notice the marching, blowing, and shouting were acts of obedience. Their obedience was faith at work; faith being manifested.

Let us cover the ground again. Did the walls fall by faith? Yes. Was it faith without works? No. Was it faith only? No. What if they had not done what God instructed? Would the walls have fallen? Certainly not. When did the faith cause the walls to fall? When the people did what God told them to do, “*after they were compassed about seven days.*”

Paul teaches we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). No Bible believer doubts this. Salvation by faith is a paramount and cardinal point in the doctrine of Christ. But are we saved by faith without works? No, not without works of obedience. When are we saved by faith? When faith leads us to obey the commands given that pertain to salvation. What are these commands? Believe (John 8:24); repent (Luke 13:13); confess our faith that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10); be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).

A Gift From God

Notice again that Scripture says that God gave Jericho to Israel. (Joshua 6:2,16). *“Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city.”* They did not earn it apart from God. Their works alone were useless. Marching, blowing, shouting, even the mightiest military array would have failed except God had said that was what they were to do. But when God told them what was to be done, even these otherwise illogical acts took on tremendous importance.

Jericho was a gift from God. But when did God give them the city? He gave it to them in promise and on condition. But the actual gift was not their's until they had obeyed. By the grace of God, He gave them the city when their faith led them to obey His commands.

In the same fashion and according to the same principle, God gives us our spiritual salvation by His grace when our faith leads us to obey what He has commanded. Not by works of merit, or works of the Mosaic Law, but by works of obedience we are saved (James 2:17).

Two False Doctrines

This record of the fall of Jericho refutes two very prominent false doctrines. The first false doctrine is the teaching of salvation by faith alone. Just believe and that is the whole thing according to some. Many will teach the need to be baptized, but not to be saved, but only to “join the church.” This shows they neither understand the need of obedience nor the church. Some are baptized thinking they are already saved before obeying. Such teaching would be like the Lord telling Joshua that he already had the city even though they had not marched, etc. We can

easily see the necessity of the marching, blowing, and shouting, without which their faith would have been a dead faith and nothing of benefit would have been accomplished.

In like manner, baptism is necessary in order to receive the blessings of salvation. **In every instance in the Bible where baptism and salvation (or its equivalent) is mentioned together, baptism always, yes, always, comes before the blessing.** One may dismiss this, but only at their spiritual detriment.

The second false doctrine this record refutes also has to do with obedience. Salvation is a gift. Therefore, some say that being baptized is trying to work our way to heaven. Well, friend, Jericho was a gift also. Their deeds of obedience did not merit them the city. But their deeds of obedience were necessary to receive the gift. While Jesus has said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,*" some denominationalists teach, "He that believeth shall be saved, and will be baptized to prove it." One may feel comfortable following such perversions of the teaching of Christ, but I would urge otherwise. God gives when his conditions are met. No one is saved before baptism any more than the walls of the city fell before the marching, blowing, and shouting.

A Valuable Lesson

This Old Testament record of the fall of Jericho is so valuable to man today. Like other writings, it is written "*for our learning.*" (Romans 15:4). It shows God's power and wisdom. It shows the requirement of faith and obedience. It is an important event in the history of Israel as they received the land God had promised Abraham's descendants until Christ came. It reveals the process by which God gives His conditional gifts such as our salvation. It shows clearly the relationship between God's grace, man's faith, and man's obedience. The same principles that governed the fall of Jericho also govern our spiritual salvation. The walls fell "*by faith,*" and we are justified "*by faith.*" As Joshua heard the Word, believed it and obeyed it, let us also hear the Word, believe it and obey it. As Joshua received God's gift in so doing, so shall we.

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Man

Like many others, I have watched as grave workers plunged their shovels into “mother earth,” spreading it gently and systematically over a vault that contained the physical remains of someone who had died. As one watches, his thoughts and questions are manifold. What if death and the grave were really the end of man’s existence? We are persuaded that a righteous life in Christ is still the best life to live even if it was all to terminate with the grave. But how much greater would our sorrow be if that were true. Surely, the dismal hopelessness and uselessness of life would be underscored. But death is not the end. In a real sense, it is a new beginning into another phase of existence. For the Christian, death is the doorway into happiness and glory that nothing in this life could ever afford him.

Paul wrote, *“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.”* (First Thessalonians 4:13). The reason behind our hope is because of the nature God has given to man. It is because man is man, different and distinctive from everything else that God has created.

Important Questions

What about man? Where did he come from? Why is he here? Where is he going? What is he to do while he is here? These things are all answered for mankind in the inspired Word of God. *“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands. Thou hast put all things under his feet. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth.”* (Psalms 8:4-9).

Plato once defined man as simply a featherless, two-footed animal. Many today think humans are merely highly evolved animals. Because some think of themselves and others in this way they behave like animals toward each other. They have no

real reason to offer as to why people ought not treat one another in the savage fashion that animals often treat each other. But man must be more than a mere beast because man is a thinking being, capable of making choices, with sense of right and wrong and morality, who appreciates “oughtness,” and has capacities that are not known among other forms of life.

Man's Origin

The only reasonable explanation of the origin of man is that God created man, just as the book of Genesis reports. Many blasphemers deny this truth and would inject into the hearts, and lives, of their fellowman theories that would destroy the dignity of the human race. But no explanation is so simple, logical, complete, and harmonious with what man can know as the contention that man has been created by God and in the image of God. *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.”* (Genesis 1:26,27). *“For in him we live and move and have our being...For we are also his offspring.”* (Acts 17:28).

God created man distinctively. Man has a body and man is a soul or spirit. The body, which is tangible and material, dies and decays. But the spirit, which cannot be seen, lives. *“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

When God created man, He made him a perfect creature in every respect. Man was a fit associate with God. Being in the spiritual image of God as already described in Psalm 8, and also Hebrews 2:7, he was put a little lower than the angels. He was given dominion over all else that God created. Nothing else was provided a soul or spirit in God's likeness as was mankind. His home, The Garden of Eden, was a place of beauty and purity as was the soul of man. There was no sin but goodness. The garden was indeed a Paradise.

The Entrance of Sin

But man did not live up to the test of loyalty to God. Satan tempted Eve and Adam to disobey God, and that they did. This was the fall of man, the introduction of sin into the world with all of its havoc, death, sorrow and woe. Driven from his beautiful home of Eden, man's home became a land of thorns, thistles,

sweat, pain, and separation. Life became a continual struggle, ending in a physical death, as far as this world is concerned. Man gave himself over into the bondage and servitude of Satan. (Romans 6:16).

All are guilty of sin. We are not guilty of Adam's sin but we suffer some of the consequences of Adam's sin. We are all guilty of sin because *"all have sinned."* (Romans 3:23; 5:23). Man in sin by his own choices has become like those described in Romans 3:10ff that quotes from the Old Testament. *"There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

By sin, the glory of man was dimmed from its former luster. He became distasteful before God, unpleasant to His eyes, and unfit for God's association and fellowship. Such is the case with every person when they transgress the will of God. Each is responsible before God for alienating himself from God. In sin, one is no longer pure and erect as is his spirit when he enters this life. He becomes bent and stained with the hideousness of sin against his Creator. The body of man dies and becomes a corpse. There is the separation of the body and spirit (James 2:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7). The body returns to decay into the material substance from which the physical body has been formed. But the soul or spirit returns to the disposition of the *"Father of spirits."* (Hebrews 12:9; Ecclesiastes 12:7).

But man shall be resurrected from the dead. *"Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice. and shall come forth. They that have done good unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). The glory of the resurrected body will differ from the earthly body. (The reader is asked to carefully and soberly read the lengthy passage of First Corinthians 15:35-44 for the Biblical documentation of the variance between the physical and spiritual bodies.)

Following this great resurrection, *"Both of the just and the unjust,"* (Acts 24:15), there shall be the judgment. *"And as it is*

appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,” (Hebrews 9:27). *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”* (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Man's Destiny

Man's eternal destiny will be one of two eternal spiritual domains. *“And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from his goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”* He further stated, *“And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”* (Matthew 25:46).

What shall be the determining factor that shall decide the eternity of man? It is man himself. Even though he had no part in bringing about his own birth, has no power to defeat eventual physical death, has nothing to say about the coming resurrection and judgment, he can determine his destiny because God allows him to do so. God has made the human being with the power of choice, the ability to make decisions, a free-will. His volition is a part of his character. Whereas Adam decided to disobey God, as have all others, mankind, any individual, can also decide to seek forgiveness of his sins by deciding to obey what the Lord has specified in order to be saved. Of course, man can decide to reject God's offer of redemption if he wishes. Whatever man decides, man must bear the consequences of his choice.

Man's Salvation

God's plan for man's salvation involves Christ and His shed blood. By this God manifested His grace and mercy toward an undeserving sinful race. To partake of the benefits of God's offer, one must believe in Jesus as God's Son (John 8:24), repent of his sins (Luke 13:3), confess his faith in Christ as the Son of God (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). Thereafter,

having become a child of God, being washed clean of his transgressions by the blood of the Savior, one is expected to live a life compatible with the example set before him by the Lord and Savior.

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A Day Of Work

“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: The night cometh, when no man can work.” (John 9:4).

Jesus Christ is our example in all things (First Peter 2:21). This includes being our example in work. There was no laziness in Him. He was industrious, energetic, and active. Even as a youth He realized the need to be busy. He said to His mother, *“Know ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”* (Luke 2:49). In John 5:17, it is recorded, *“My Father worketh even until now, and I work.”* Peter preached to the household of Cornelius concerning His activity and said, *“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree.”* (Acts 10:38,39). In this Peter pictures our Lord as one that worked.

Our “Day”

He said we must work while it is day. The day refers to our period of life here on earth. As we live, we are in the midst of our “day.” Night is the night of death. We are to work while we can and while we have the opportunity, ability, energy, and life. We are now living and we can work for the Lord now. In fact, now is the only time that we have to work. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never be. Someone has said that life does not get finished, it just stops. There is always more and more to be done as long as we live. We have no time after physical death to work for the Lord. Therefore, we cannot postpone doing what we ought to do.

As we consider the reasons for working now, it is emphasized that the night comes when no man can work. Our opportunity is short even at the longest. We are here but for a few brief years at best. *“For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.”* (James 4:14). Since life is so uncertain and death is sure, since this is the only time in which we have to prepare for eternity, should we fail in this life we shall lose the glories of eternal salvation.

We are to work, if for no other reason, because the Lord has instructed us to work. *“But in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.”* (Acts 10:35). *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”* (Philippians 2:12). James 2:14-26 shows the necessity of working. We show our faith by our works. Without our works, our faith is a dead faith. Nobody is going to be saved by a dead faith. As Abraham worked, so must we. As Rahab worked, so must we. We do not merit salvation by our works, but neither shall we enjoy salvation without our works. *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”* (James 2:24).

What is the work that we have to do? One primary concern of the Christian is the developing of a Christlike character. Christian character does not just happen. It must be intended. It comes through growth and takes effort. It is gradually developed. One gains godly strength step by step, not by leaps and bounds. It takes work, prayer, spiritual nourishment and godly exercise.

Developing Character

Character might be likened unto a tree. The roots are the Beautitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:2-10). The branches are the virtues of which we read in Second Peter 1:5-9); such as, faith, diligence, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. The fruit of the tree is the fruit of the Spirit. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law.”* (Galatians 5:22,23)

Saving The Lost

Our work is also the salvation of others. Someone has said, "We have been saved to save others." This expressed the soul-winning disposition that the Christian is to have. The church, which is composed of the saved, is as a lighthouse for those who are on the dark sea of sin. As the familiar song suggests, "Let the lower lights be burning, Send a gleam across the wave." That is the work of the church. We are to be as lights in the world, the salt of the earth, as a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14-16). Our light is to so shine that others may see our good works and glorify God, the Father of Heaven.

The gospel is the light that men must have. Second Corinthians 4:4 speaks of the "*light of the gospel.*" We are "*begotten of the gospel.*" (First Corinthians 4:15). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It must be preached and taught so that it can be heard, believed, and obeyed. Paul wrote, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:13-17).

Jesus said, "*No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*" (John 6:44,45).

Let The World Hear

It is my work, and the work of every brother and sister in Christ to see to it that the world hears the gospel. When one is telling the gospel story, there is no more essential work that could be done. There is no nobler work. There is nothing of greater importance to mankind than the gospel. "*And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.*" (Daniel 12:3). "*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and*

shall hide a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19,20).

So we see we are to work while we can. We must know what our work is. We must know why we must work now.

Rest Awaits Us

Some day we shall be blessed by resting from our labors. *“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.”* (Revelation 14:13). We must work before we rest. But we shall eventually lay down our tools and cease from our labors. *“Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season, we shall reap if we faint not.”* (Galatians 6:9).

Let us resolve to be a worker for the Lord. Let us sing with sincerity, “I want to be a worker for the Lord.”

Before we can work for God, we must be in Christ. We are to work in His vineyard, not the vineyard of the devil. We enter that vineyard by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. We are to labor faithfully in that vineyard, knowing that at the end of the “day” we shall be rewarded by the Father above.

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A Mark Of Wisdom

A wise person will solicit and listen to advice that comes from the lips of those who are studious, experienced, and have proven themselves to not only be reliable but have demonstrated wisdom in their own lives.

Too many people seek the advice and counsel from faulty sources and proceed to follow in the steps of those whose steps have led from one disaster to another. None of us should be so egotistical that we cannot learn from others, especially those as described above.

The real source of wisdom, guidance, direction and counsel is the infallible Word of God, the Bible. *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...”* (James 1:5). We deprive ourselves of the fountain of undefiled consultation and instruction if we do not come to a knowledge of the Word of God.

God said the reason His people were destroyed, Hosea 4:6, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”* Proverbs 2:6, *“For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”* JWB

Honesty About Abortion

Do you suppose those endorsing abortion will ever honestly face the realities? Does it matter to them that innocent human life is being deliberately destroyed? Is it of any concern that the overwhelming majority of abortions are because of immorality and is but a means to "cover" the consequences of irresponsible moral conduct?

People talk about the woman having power over her body. She does when she engages in sexual intercourse. But when another life is conceived that life also must be taken into consideration.

The brutality, cruelty and savage barbarism that characterizes abortion says something dreadful about those who condone it. Who is honest enough to face it? Even the illogical tri-level periods of three month intervals admit there is more in the womb that just "a blob of tissue."

Those who promote and condone abortion are not known to sanction standards of morality, or that humans are anything but animals. Their cry is a twisted and perverted "freedom" which has degenerated into license to accumulate evil atop evil. Honesty will admit this. But shall we expect honesty from those who would slaughter the unborn?



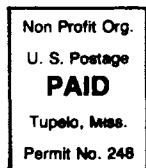
JAMES W. BOYD

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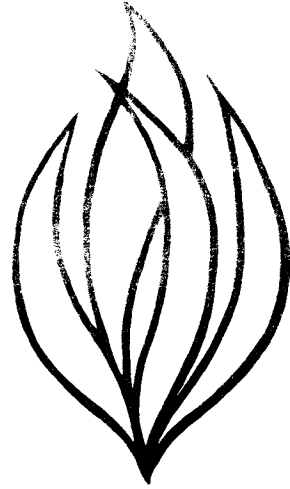
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**EAST MAIN CHURCH OF CHRIST
A BURNING FIRE
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A Burning Fire



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



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Why The Law Of Moses Had To Cease

If there was more understanding about the place of the law of Moses in God's scheme of things, much of the error in the religious world would cease to exist. Because of misunderstanding and misapplication of the law of Moses there has been created a mixture of Judaism and Christianity that can only dishonor God's Son. Even many in this day and time look to the teaching that God gave through Moses as their authority for what they do religiously. Some will point to the Mosaic law as the authority for a special priesthood, instrumental music, burning incense, and many other matters. Some continue to make a pretense of observing the Sabbath Day that was done under Moses. The denial of the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins stems to a great extent from a misplacement of the law of Moses and the way God formerly has dealt with mankind.

Not In Effect Now

The law of Moses is no longer in effect or applicable as to the ways and laws by which God governs man today. Those living now, neither Jew nor Gentile, will stand before God in judgment and be judged according to the law of Moses. Even though it came from God, its term of service has long ago been reached and terminated.

Our subject is asking the question, "Why did the law have to cease?" If we believe and accept the inspired record of the New Testament, we will have no doubts in our mind that the old law, the law of Moses, had to cease. If the law of Moses had not ceased, the law of Christ could never have come into effect. To understand that this is so, we must know something more about that old and former system.

Only To Israel

The law was only given to the Israelites, the Jews. Deuteronomy 5:1-3, "*The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers,*

but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.” It was a law that was not in force prior to the time of Moses. It was never a law which governed Gentiles. Inasmuch as salvation is offered to all, there was of necessity the establishment of a law that not only would include Jews, but also Gentiles as well. The law of Moses never could do that.

We might wonder why the law was ever given. Paul asked, and answered that question. “*Wherefore then serveth the law?*” (Galatians 3:19). He responded, “*It was added because of transgression.*” The law of Moses served as a guide, God’s rule and schoolmaster to govern the Jews and bring them unto the time of the long-promised Messiah. Through the types, shadows, symbols, representations, pictures, of the law of Moses God gave somewhat of a preview of the basic principles of the universal law that He would give through Christ. This law was to serve as the divine standard for Israel in the development of a religious heritage and a holy nation through which the Savior would come.

Intended To Be Temporary

The law was never intended to be a law to last until the end of time. Just as it was limited as to those to whom it applied, so it was limited as to the time it would be in effect. It would last “...*till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.*” (Galatians 3:19). In Galatians 3:16, Paul asserted that the “*seed*” of the promise to Abraham referred to Christ. Christ is Abraham’s seed that fulfilled the promises that God gave to Abraham. The law of Moses was not the fulfillment of that promise. It was a temporary measure for the Jews until Christ came. It was designed to be taken out of the way once “*the faith*” had come. Paul even reasoned how the Old Testament teaching taught that (Galatians 4:21-31) in the account of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael.

More specifically, Paul wrote in Colossians 2:14, “*Blotting out the handwriting contained in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.*” Christ did not come to “*destroy*” the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17,18). The law had served as a “*middle wall of partition*” between Jew and Gentile, but by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, that middle wall was broken down and ceased to be (Ephesians 2:13-18).

It is not too uncommon to hear religious teachers still saying

that people should live by the law of Moses, and can be saved by the law of Moses, and that the law of Moses is still in effect. But such teaching is contradictory to the strong and repeated statements of inspired men.

The law that was removed included the Ten Commandments. They have been set aside as far as God's will today through the Mosaic authority. There are some who say that only the "ceremonial law" has been set aside, and not the "moral law." The Scriptures make no such distinction as that regarding the law and breaking it into two parts. Surely, the ordinances of the law can be categorized into these two categories, but the Scriptures make no kind of assertion or insinuation that only one part of the law is removed.

All Of It Is Removed

It is plain and easy to see that Paul taught that even the moral commandments have been removed, as far as coming through Moses. Romans 7:1-7 teaches that we are no longer under the old law, and Paul uses the moral commandment, "*Thou shalt not covet,*" as an example of the law to which he had reference. Just as a wife is no longer bound to her husband once he has died, so none are bound anymore to the law for it is dead. And the law to which he referred included the tenth of the Ten Commandments. There is no part of the law of Moses to which we are accountable today. To be sure, there are many inclusions in the law of Christ that resemble ordinances found in the Mosaic law, some even identical to the Mosaic law, and others expanded upon. But we live under the authority of Christ. It is wrong to steal, not because Moses said so, but because it is a part of the doctrine of Christ to not steal.

The very nature of the Ten Commandments made it necessary for them to cease. Much of them dealt only with the outward and overt acts of sin. There was only minor consideration of the intents and purposes of the heart. The law of Christ gave emphasis to both the heart and the deeds of men. Regretfully, I recently heard a teacher, one of the brethren, make a glaring doctrinal error in suggesting that Christ was only concerned with the heart and not with deeds. That is not so; He is concerned with both. The law of Moses was more concerned with the deed. For instance, the law said, "*Thou shalt not kill.*" This means not to murder. But the law of Christ goes beyond that and condemns even the hatred of others, which is the

heart-seed from which murder grows. “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,” wrote John in First John 3:15. The law said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” The way of Christ goes into the heart and forbids lust that precedes the overt act of adultery. To have a governing system that reached the inward man, a new and different law was necessary. The old law had to cease. And please note how often we have reference to the fact that we are still living under law, even though it is not the law of Moses. We still live under law, and that law is the law of Christ.

Hebrews 7:11-12, “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood...what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek and not after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed there is made a necessity a change also of the law.” The priesthood was changed. The law that governed that priesthood could not continue. The Bible teaches that Christ is a priest forever, and that every Christian is a priest, not just those of the Jewish tribe of Levi. The law that considered only the lineage of Aaron as high priest would have clashed with the priesthood of Christ because Christ was of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). Yet, He is our high priest (Hebrews 3:1). The law had to be changed for this reason. It had to cease.

Confusion Erased

What confusion would reign if two laws were to coexist that differed one from the other. That even creates problems among human laws. Man could not expect to serve God “*decently and in order*” if there were two differing laws binding upon him. In fact, we are touching on the heart of the major problem in the religious world today; namely, the futile attempts of some to follow man’s laws and God’s law at the same time. Such confusion does not exist and God would not be the author of it.

There was no promise to come by the law of Moses. To be sure Moses spoke of the Messiah that was to come. The promise that God gave to Abraham was accomplished in Christ (Galatians 3:16). If one wants the blessing that God offers because of the promise to Abraham, then he must come to Christ. “*And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.*” (Galatians 3:29). We cannot attain such favors through the law of Moses. The inheritance is not of the law. “*For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise, but God granted it to Abraham by promise.*”

(Galatians 3:18). There had to be a new and better system, and the old law had to cease its function.

It Was Not The Cure

Moses' law could not and did not bring perfection, even in the sense of completeness and wholeness, let alone sinlessness and forgiveness. Suppose for a moment you were very sick, nigh unto death, and medical science found a drug that would postpone death only one year at a time but no longer. It would never provide a cure. Then suddenly an announcement was made that there was a medicine that once taken, it would cure you forever and no other medicine would ever be needed. How would you react to such an announcement? This is an ample illustration of how the old law of Moses compares with the new law and system through Christ. *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."* (Hebrews 10:1). Christ was offered once for all and there is no longer the need for the repeated sacrifices of animals, by which sins could not be removed anyway (Hebrews 10:4). By His one sacrifice, *"He taketh away the first that He might establish the second,"* and that which He established provides for the forgiveness of sins. The old law had to make way for the new.

Again, the Mosaic Law had to cease because of the existence of another law from which one could not be freed by the Mosaic law. This other law is what Paul called *"the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:2). Exekiel 18:20 reads, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* This refers to a spiritual death, a separation from God. Romans 6:23, *"The wages of sin is death."* This is the penalty for unforgiven sin. This law of sin and death ever exists. But, even though the law of Moses was weak and could not deliver us from the law of sin and death, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made us free from the law of sin and death. It was not possible that the blood of animals could accomplish this (Hebrews 10:4). But it is accomplished by the once-offered blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:12;28; 10:10).

It Was Not Evil

The law of Moses was not something sinister and evil. It was not against the promises that God gave through Abraham (Galatians 3:21). By the law and the study of it we all can come to an understanding of the nature and ruin that accompanies sin. We can see how desperately those in sin need salvation. And by that law we have presentations of the system of Christ that shows to us fully that God's plan is the system through Christ. But we now live under that "*perfect law of liberty*" of which James speaks in James 1:25. We live under law. The system of grace through Christ involves a system of law and works of obedience. If we ever enjoy the spiritual blessedness that we must have to live successfully in this life and enter heaven when this life is over, we must follow the law of Christ. The old law has served its turn and is now set aside. It was God's plan to give it, and God's plan that it cease. Let us respect God's plan.

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He Knew The Reason

What happened to him is very similar to what happens to many people who profess to have become Christians. Could this be something applicable to one of us?

The small boy went to bed as usual and soon fell asleep. But before very long his parents heard a noisy THUMP in the boy's room and rushed in to see what was the matter.

The boy had fallen out of his bed and when he hit the floor he was suddenly awakened and realized he was not where he was supposed to be.

His parents were relieved that he had not hurt himself, but they asked, "How did you happen to fall out of your bed?"

As quick as a wink, and almost as if he had given his answer some real thought, he responded, "I guess I went to sleep to close to where I got in."

That may be the reason some who have been baptized find themselves "flooded" by Satan and his devices. "*Awake thou that sleepest*" may be the very admonition more of us need to heed. Getting too comfortable too quickly can prove to be spiritually detrimental, don't you think? JWB

What Baptism Will Not Do

There are those religious people who say that we talk too much about baptism. More than likely this is said because they do not talk about it at all. Recently, one was heard to say that you could tell if a “Campbellite” preacher was preaching because they will eventually talk about baptism. Well, why not? Paul preached it. Was he a Campbellite? Peter preached it. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all preached it. Jesus preached it. Were they Campbellites? I am no Campbellite and I preach baptism and preach it just like the aforementioned men preached it. The trouble with many religious people is that they reject what the Word of God teaches regarding it and resent those who accept it and proclaim it. We give place to such as that, not for a moment. They are like the man who was caught stealing and was brought to trial. One witness after another testified of his guilt. Finally, the judge asked him if he wanted to say anything, and he responded, “I think too much as been said already.” Little wonder that those who dislike the Bible message think we preach on baptism too often.

Can We Overemphasize?

Is it possible to overemphasize anything that God has taught? We think not. It is very possible to underemphasize what He has taught. Many pulpits will stress faith, love, hope, morality, etc. and nobody complains that it is overstressed. We do contend for balanced preaching, but not preaching one thing to the neglect of another. Paul preached the whole counsel of God and so should we. I am persuaded if more of our religious objectors preached on the subject more and taught the truth about it, our task of preaching it as often as we do would not be as demanding. Baptism is one of God’s commands and men must obey, and obey for the reason it is commanded.

But even then, we must realize that there are some things that baptism will not accomplish because God has not commanded baptism for just any and every purpose. Its purposes are limited. So now we study the subject “What Baptism Will Not Do.”

Three Changes

Conversion to Christ involves three distinct changes: (1) The sinner's heart, convictions, and allegiance must be changed. (2) His manner of life must be changed. (3) His relationship to God must be changed. The person who changes in all three of these ways is converted to Christ. A person may love sin, but now loves righteousness. He once practiced sin, but now practices righteousness. He was in Satan's kingdom, but now is a citizen in the church, the Lord's kingdom.

There are three divine appointments or commands to be obeyed for the purpose of accomplishing these three changes. God uses faith to accomplish the needed change in man's allegiance and convictions. In order for man to do the "*will of God from the heart*," (Ephesians 6:6), his heart must be right. His faith must reside in Christ, the only way to God (John 14:6). "*Except ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*" (John 8:24). True obedience stems from the heart (Romans 6:17,18). Those people to whom Paul wrote are said to have obeyed from the heart.

Even though baptism has an important place in God's scheme of redemption, baptism does not change the heart of man. Faith changes man's loyalties, convictions, and service. And faith is produced by the Word of God. (Romans 10:17). As one hears the evidence presented in God's Word and considers it, he comes to believe.

The change in one's manner of life is the result of genuine repentance. Jesus taught, "*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" (Luke 13:3). Repentance is a change of mind toward sin, a change of mind toward Christ, brought about by godly sorrow, and results in a reformation of life. A change in conviction is useless unless it takes action in a change of mind that will lead to a change of life. One cannot continue living in sin and be pleasing to God. (Romans 6:1,2).

As important as the Bible teaches baptism is, that change of mind is not accomplished by baptism. That is repentance, a repentance motivated by a faith and confidence in Christ.

The third change, the change of relationship with God, follows faith and repentance. Whereas we were servants of sin, we become servants of righteousness by our obedience (Romans 6:17,18). When Paul was convinced that Jesus was the Son of God, he gave evidence of repentance and was baptised (Acts 22:16). The Jews on Pentecost, showing evidence that they believed the gospel message as preached by Peter and asking what they must do, were told to repent and be baptized (Acts

2:38). Those who are baptized are those who are made sons and daughters of God and by baptism enter into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Salvation is “*in Christ*” (Second Timothy 2:10), so it is important that we get into Christ, and that is done by baptism (Romans 6:3,4).

Friend, conversion is not complete until these three changes have occurred.

“For The Remission of Sins”

Baptism is “*for the remission of sins.*” (Acts 2:38). Baptism is in water (Acts 8:38,39; 10:47,48). Even so, the water of baptism will not remove our sins. There are those who falsely accuse gospel preachers of preaching “water salvation” because they preach baptism in water to be saved. But nobody that has ever taught the truth has ever considered the power to save being the element of water. It is simply the element into which one must be baptized. We do not preach what is commonly called “baptismal generation.” We place no efficacy with the water itself, but rely wholly and totally on God and the blood of His Son to be saved.

Salvation is an operation of God (Colossians 2:12), an operation that God performs when we obey His command to be baptized. Since it pleases God to save man in such fashion, why should any man object?

Naaman was healed of his leprosy (Second Kings 5) when he dipped himself seven times in Jordan. But neither he, nor anyone else, credits the waters of Jordan with healing power. God healed him. But when did God heal him? It was when he obeyed what God told him to do and not a second before. Naaman glorified God, not the water. But neither did he deny the need of going into the water, as some anti-baptism people do today. Peter said that baptism saves (First Peter 3:21), but not in the sense that there is power in the water. The power is in the blood and it is in baptism that we reach His blood. When we are baptized we are baptized into His death where His blood was shed. (Romans 6:3,4).

Does Not Immunize

Nor can we expect baptism to remove and immunize us from temptation. After baptism, we are in Christ and one of the saved. But we are still human beings, not gods who are perfect

and not subject to temptation. Repeatedly, the Scriptures warn the Christian against falling to temptation. *“Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”* (First Corinthians 10:12). Why would Paul comfort his brethren that they could endure trial and temptation if they, once baptized, were immune to its havoc? (First Corinthians 10:13). Even Paul realized he could be tempted and become a castaway (First Corinthians 9:27). It is no sin to be tempted. Sin is yielding to temptation. Jesus was tempted, but sinned not (Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 2:22). John teaches us that we make ourselves liars to say we do not sin (First John 1:8-10).

Forgives Past Sins

Baptism does not forgive future sins that we may commit after baptism. We are purged from our old sins (Second Peter 1:9). But in baptism we are not forgiven of sins that we have not yet committed. Baptism does not give us a license to live as we see fit thereafter. Having come to Christ, we are not to live in sin (Romans 6:1,2). We often do sin (First John 1:8-10). Baptism places us in a relationship with God where we have access to the avenue of prayer for forgiveness, but baptism does not forgive future sins. When we sin, there is no need to be baptized again because by baptism we are no longer children of the devil but children of God. Once baptized, we are in Christ and can pray for forgiveness, after we have repented of our sins (Acts 8:22). Baptism washes away past sins, changing our status before God, but we are not given a lifelong “indulgence” that says all sins we commit hereafter are forgiven.

No Guarantee

This leads us to the important point that baptism does not assure and guarantee we shall go to heaven. While baptism is essential to reach heaven, for God has made it a condition to meet, the child of God must live faithfully in order to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10; Second Timothy 4:6-8). *“Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.”* (Galatians 6:9). We are not to think that if we faint along the way that the benefits will be the same as if we remained steadfast.

Too many times we have heard it said by members of the church, those added to the church by baptism (Acts 2:47), “Oh,

I have been baptized,” and even though they are living a sinful and unfaithful life, they are relying totally on the fact that their baptism has assured them that they shall see God in all of His glory. This is not so. We read of baptized people falling away, forsaking the truth, apostatizing. Baptism is the beginning of being a Christian, not the end. One who is baptized but is not loyal to His Lord will lose his relationship with God and be lost in hell, lest he repent and pray.

Baptism does not change your allegiance. It will not produce the change in your life. It does not forgive sins by virtue of the water itself. Nor will it remove temptation, the ability to sin, and will not forgive sins not yet committed. It is not a guarantee of heaven.

Baptism is the way that God has provided for us to be washed clean by the blood of Christ. It changes our relationship with God and, by obedience to His divinely given direction to be baptized, He adds us to the saved, which is the church, composed of His sons and daughters in Christ.

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Same Things Are Different

You would think a twenty dollar bill was a twenty dollar bill wherever you saw one. But evidently some folks do not see it that way. If it takes a twenty, or several of them, to go to a ball game, have a dinner, or take in some entertainment, that seems reasonable. But that same bill grows to gigantic proportions when its destiny becomes the contribution plate.

Sixty minutes is an hour, or is it? With some people you can link several of them together as they sit on a backless bench, in the rain, or turn their mind to neutral and stay before the TV. But sixty minutes is all they can stand in worship to God. And if they are urged to do that twice in a week they think you are fanatical and unreasonable. Why?

Why are children allowed to “make their own decision” about attending Bible study, but never allowed the same opportunity about attending their secular school? Figure it out and let me know if you discover the difference. JWB

A Walk Pleasing To God

“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.” (First Thessalonians 4:1,2).

Living the life as a Christian as God has prescribed is presented to us in many different figures and illustrations. Sometimes it is shown as a race, an athletic event, a game to be played and a prize to be won. It is also presented as a warfare, like working in a vineyard or constructing a building. In the above passage it is pictured as a walk or a journey. It is not unlike Hebrews 11:8-10, *“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.”* Again, First Peter 1:17, *“And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.”*

Walk To Please God

Paul wrote that he had shown his brethren how they ought to walk and how to please God. Let us understand the importance of pleasing God, rather than men. *“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”* (Galatians 1:10). *“Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.”* (Ephesians 6:6,7). *“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”* (Acts 5:29). We must therefore conclude that we are required to walk pleasing to God. He is to have the priority of our allegiance, first, last, and always.

The expression of *walking* is used differently in revealing possible relationship to God. We are to walk **with** God; we are

to walk **before** God; and we are to walk **after** God. Each has a singular meaning and when all three are rightly considered, they have a collective meaning.

With God

First, let us consider the walk **with** God. In Genesis 5:22, we read, "*Enoch walked with God.*" Here is a picture of a human being having companionship with Deity. There is a nearness to God and communion with Him that Enoch enjoyed because he chose to walk with God. Side by side, Enoch kept in step with God. It is that way with us as we live a faithful Christian life. We go hand in hand with Him, He in us and we in Him, and we benefit from our fellowship with Deity. "*Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,*" (First John 1:3).

It is a tragic event when men so conduct themselves that they get ahead of God and lose that fellowship. Moses, in his early life, got ahead of God. He supposed that his brethren would recognize him to be their deliverer and he determined to deliver Israel his own way and at a time that he determined. But he got ahead of God and God's plans and ways. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1,2), got ahead of God by doing what God had not authorized in worship to Him. They offered that which the Lord commanded not. People can still get ahead of God and cause themselves distress. "*Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God.*" (Second John 9).

Sometimes people get too far behind God. Are we ever like Peter, who followed the Lord, but followed Him "*afar off*"? Too far behind our Lord is tantamount to refusing Him.

We must be in agreement with God in order to walk with God. Amos asked "*Can two walk together except they be agreed?*" (Amos 3:3). The power of the apostles rested in their willingness to walk with Jesus and live in agreement with Him.

As best as we can calculate, Enoch walked with God for about 300 years. Genesis 5:22, that tells us that Enoch walked with God, records his pattern of life after the birth of his son, Methusalah. He probably walked with God even before that. It has some significance to me that Enoch recognized a deep and serious duty of a father, that Methusalah, his son, never knew a day but that his father walked with God. Can your children and mine say as much?

We sing a hymn that is designed to express the thought we are laboring to present. I do not consider the song as some kind of suggestion of a mystic and direct communication with Deity, but one that denotes the fellowship we have with Christ when we are in Christ. "I come to the garden alone...and He walks with me and He talks with me." Should not our prayer ever be, "All along my pilgrim journey, let me safely walk with Thee...Close to Thee"?

Walk Before God

Second, we also walk **before** God. Genesis 17:1, "*And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.*" Abram was to ever be in the presence of God, being under the constant inspection of the Almighty. We are no different. We are as soldiers marching before the inspection of God, not in large numbers and great companies, but single file. At the close of his illustrious and righteous life, Samuel said, "*I have walked before you from childhood.*" (First Samuel 12:2). The idea was that his life had been an open book for all the people to read and inspect. It is that way as we live before God.

When we go to the store and buy clothes, we will walk before the mirror in order to see how they look on us, how they fit, and determine if they pass our inspection. On most assembly lines in the factories there are those who inspect the work being produced to see to it that the standards are being maintained and flaws removed.

"For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good. Let him seek peace and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (First Peter 3:10-12). "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*" (Proverbs 15:3).

Isaac said to his servant that he walked before God. Hezekiah is said to have walked before God (Isaiah 38:3). These statements should sober our thinking in the realization that God sees, knows, observes, and is aware of our every deed, thought, and motive. It is all manifest before Him.

This thought ought also console and comfort us in the knowledge that as we walk before God He can and does protect

us and provide for us as He sees is best for us. He knows when we do wrong, but He also knows when we do right and are sincerely trying to do His will.

B. C. Goodpasture once used the illustration that in the afternoon, when the sun was still up, he would go to the barn with his father and allow his father to go ahead of him and he would come along. During the daylight, he was not the least bit afraid of anything in the way or anything coming up behind him. But coming back, after the sun had set and darkness prevailed, he said he walked right in front of his father, and not too far ahead. He then knew that if anything came at him from the darkness His father was there to care for him.

Walk After God

Third, we walk **after** God. Deuteronomy 13:4, "*Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.*" This projects the thought of following God. God is our leader and we are His followers. There is always the danger of following the wrong leader. Jesus warned, "*And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*" (Matthew 15:14). The story is told of how a man was driving in a snowstorm and lost his way. Suddenly, he saw some red lights glowing in front of him and he realized it was a truck going the same direction he was, so he determined to follow the truck. Further down the way the truck's lights disappeared. The truck had left the road and plunged off a cliff. The man following after in his car almost did the same thing. "*Follow not the multitude to do evil,*" was the instruction given Israel in Exodus 23:2. The downfall of Solomon was following the lead of his foreign wives into idolatry and away from the living and true God of heaven. Israel's downfall is largely attributable to their desire to be like the nations round about them. They fell victim to following the wrong leader.

Many are going the way of sin and destruction because they are inclining themselves to the satisfaction of their own lusts and ambitions. Others are following man-made doctrines and systems. Still others are allowing themselves to follow their consciences wheresoever it may lead them.

To please God we must follow Christ. "*For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*" (First Peter 2:21).

John teaches us to “walk in the light as he is in the light.” (First John 1:7). “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” (First John 2:6). Paul wrote, “Be ye imitators of me, even as I am of Christ.” (First Corinthians 11:1). Our walk after God would be made easier if we were able to see more of the imitation of Christ in each other. We ought to be content to follow after God.

Each expression of walking has its own meaning. We have fellowship and companionship to walk **with** God. We realize God is our Judge and protector as we walk **before** God. We are to go the way that God leads and walk **after** God.

When we put the expressions together we get another very important conclusion. To walk **before** God in an acceptable manner and receive His care, we must first walk **with** God and be in agreement with Him. To be agreed with God means that we must walk **after** God, following Him and His way as He has revealed it in His Word.

Christ, The Way

What is God’s way for man? We could summarize by saying the way is Christ. As for man’s duty, we could summarize by saying it is to trust and obey, become a Christian and then live as a Christian in faithfulness. To hear the Word, believe it, repent of sins, confess our faith that Jesus is God’s Son, and be baptized is the way we begin our walk. Should we fall away, we renew our walk by being restored through repentance of sins, confession of our sinfulness, and going to God in prayer asking His forgiveness. This is the walk that is pleasing to God.

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(continued from page 24)

capable younger brethren seek other lines of primary work as they see the lack of respect being given to faithful gospel preachers. No, they don’t preach for money. They preach because of love for God, His truth, His Son, His church, the lost and the saved. But they are deserving far better than what many brethren are willing to do on their behalf. When do those in charge come to realize preaching brethren are vital factors in the congregation and begin to render to them the financial consideration due them? In many, many instances, it is long overdue.

JWB

Christian Education

We preach many sermons regarding the Christian and his conduct in all of the various sectors of one's life. We talk about the Christian and his occupation, or the Christian and his recreation. We preach concerning the Christian and his association with others, and his relationship to the government. It seems only reasonable that we would talk about the Christian and his education. Even though many have a very limited concept of "Christian education," we hope this lesson will broaden our thinking and make it more in harmony with the Biblical concept of education of a Christian.

"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:6). *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6). Both of these verses have to do with Christian education.

The Treasure of Children

We would insist that our richest treasure is our children. Our greatest loss, other than the loss of the soul, is the loss of our children and this involves the loss of the soul. Yet, one of the most serious neglects of the human family is the proper spiritual development of its children. When we guide and train our children aright, the influence of that good work will be felt for generations to come. When we do a bad job regarding our children, that influence will also have repercussions for generations to come.

The founding fathers of our nations wrote into our law the concept of freedom of religion. The first amendment states that Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. It is terribly unfortunate that many have taken this noble concept of freedom **of** religion to mean freedom **from** religion. There is a great difference. Freedom of religion is threatened by Catholicism, communism, atheism, humanism, etc. But freedom from religion will destroy all of our freedoms.

Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4). This irrefutable truth was spoken by the Son of God nearly two

thousand years ago. Some today evidently consider themselves wiser than Deity and they plan and live their lives as if the Word of God should have no place. Jesus also taught, *“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”* (Mark 8:36). So many misguided people have concentrated upon the “here and now” to the extent that they ignore the realities of that which is to come. This has been evidenced in the securing of one’s education as well as in other realms of activity.

No Religious Training

We are informed that over one-half of the children of America are receiving no religious training with any sort of system. We tremble over what the inevitable consequences for the nation will be in a few years with this neglect. Already atheism is running unchecked and promoted in many lands, and humanism is fast becoming the national religion in America. The results are turning the nation into a giant Sodom and Gomorrah. Children are learning secular knowledge and secular skills, but are unguided and unrestricted because they are growing up in a religious vacuum, not learning morality, values of dignity, or any such thing. They are growing up to be educated animals and highly skilled fools.

As Christians, we should desire the best education we can provide for our young. We live in an era of man’s existence when preparation and learning is so important. The unprepared will have a difficult time in the future, probably more than ever. Only the prepared have the doors of opportunity opened to them. Only the prepared are able to seize the opportunities when they are opened. To a great extent, the measure of preparation is determined by one’s education. So many young people, who “drop out” of the educating process are so short-sighted and fail to visualize this reality.

Life is for those who prepare for it. The development of both mental and physical talents is imperative. It is God’s will that we grow in favor with God and man, wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). To deliberately neglect this is sinful.

The Best Education

An education that is void of the spiritual and moral qualities and values as has been decreed by the God of heaven through

His Son is not the best education, regardless of how many years, degrees, or academic standings one can accumulate. No matter how well “educated” a person may be, he or she is little more than a powerful machine out of control if his or her education is not guided by the teaching of Christ. Knowledge without wisdom is dangerous to everyone. Wisdom is a quality that comes from God (James 1:15). Some educational procedures provide knowledge but “Christian education” provides knowledge and wisdom.

Many of the most vicious and clever criminals the world has known have been highly educated people according to the world’s standards. Tyrants, dictators, mad-men that have wrought immeasurable havoc on the entire world have been people of high educational levels. Every effort must be made to remove the obstacles in the paths of the young so that they might attain spiritual wisdom as they attain secular knowledge. Unfortunately, the educational institutions of our nations have become institutions that produce more and more obstacles and hindrances rather than removing such things. As one brilliant scholar of an instructor said on the opening day of his class, “If any of you students have any old foggy ideas about religion, park them on the outside of this class.” This is about the level of “thinking” in educational circles throughout the land, for the greater part. As the young attempt to secure their education, they have every energy that godless people can produce thrown at them. Christ is ignored, ridiculed, suppressed. What is needed is “Christian education.”

Not Just Schools

Some seem to think that “Christian education” refers to what is done in schools operated by Christian people. To whatever extent this is true, (often these schools are hindrances rather than helps) “Christian education” in schools is but a small part of it. In fact, more and more we are seeing that the work of the schools is undoing that sound Christian education being done by the home and the church.

Christian education begins in infancy, in the home, and never ends so long as one lives. Christianity in the home, or the lack of it, will reflect itself in the lives of children when they reach adulthood. “*Train up a child*” is the parental duty first and foremost before any and everyone else.

It Never Ends

One should never consider that his Christian education has ceased. It is a cradle-to-the-grave affair. Emphasis upon what some call “Christian education” centering only during the school years and periods of formal education is a narrow and unwarranted consideration of the subject.

For emphasis sake, let us repeat where the responsibility for educating children resides, both spiritual and secular; it is the home, father and mother. Public schools came into being as a communal effort to assist the home in educating children. Let us not close our eyes to reality because of prejudice; the public educational systems of America today are probably the worst enemy to the cause of Christ that exists in our borders. This is because humanism, evolution, atheism, immorality, no values, “do-your-own-thing” philosophies have dominated the scene until “down with God” is almost the rallying cry of the public educational systems. We are aware of exceptions, and are aware of individual exceptions, but the controlling influences on every level of the public and state educational institutions, and many privately operated systems, are in step with the devil rather than God. Many might deny it, remembering the time when such was not so just a few years ago. To deny it, ignore it, and dismiss it, is just exactly why it is predominately true today. Parents of faith have a tremendous task providing for the secular training of their children through public schools because of the anti-God sentiments that so often are in evidence. The documentation of this reality is too awesome and widespread for honest people to deny, and too deadly for Christian people to ignore. But even if there were no public schools, the responsibility of the education of your child rests on you.

A Parental Responsibility

Christian education or the spiritual training of your child rests on parents. The “Christian schools” can be an assistant to the home but never a replacement. The “Christian schools” that are worthy are deserving of the support of the home. It is not the work of the church to provide secular education, even for the children of Christians.

When a “Christian school” is as it ought to be there are certain very useful and valuable qualities that pertain to it. Before we consider these, we regretfully must recognize that not all

“Christian schools,” even those operated by our brethren, are really what is needful. In fact, on the college, university, and graduate school levels, they are becoming more and more a detriment to the maintenance of the purity of the faith because of the false teachers that exist on the faculties and are allowed to remain there year after year. The uncertain and unsound teaching that is being implanted in the minds of so many of the young is already having a devastating effect on the church; but it does not have to be that way. Unfortunately, in more cases than we would like to think, it has become so.

Nonetheless, “Christian schools” can help the home in providing a secular education in a spiritual and Christian setting. When their teachers are faithful and sound Christian people, what a benefit this is to the student. When the teaching done is harmonious with the sound Christian education given by the home and the church, the schools are valuable.

The Bible classes teach the Christian values and virtues, when the truth is taught. We would that the teachers would be more concerned about the truth than some seem to be about their degrees and theological garbage so many have absorbed during their quest for their degrees. However, sound Biblical instruction cannot be measured for its worth. This is also true regarding the daily worship services.

Campus Benefits

The Christian environment, atmosphere, activities, social functions and attitudes that resound over the campus is of spiritual help to the educating of young people. Probably a tightening of standards has become very much in order, but when the Christian standard is upheld, what a difference for the youth. Having attended schools of both kinds, I can speak with some degree of authority concerning such things.

Alongside these other benefits is that of association with those of common faith and conviction. Young people can make friends of God’s children, find marriage partners that will be a help for both to get to heaven. Yes, there are tragic exceptions. Whereas the tragedies are almost the rule on other campuses, they are still the exceptions from the campuses of “Christian schools.”

There is no real excuse for the secular education of Christian youth on Christian school campuses to be inferior. We urge superiority. And there is no excuse for relaxing the Christian

values and standards in order to attain what the unbelieving world has arbitrarily determined to be the superior secular education. One of the real mis-directions of our Christian schools today is the feeling that they must accommodate all the anti-God nonsense that runs characteristic of the academic community. They feel they have to belong to the scholastic associations. They feel they must have the proper number of high degree people before they can provide what is needed. Nobody ought think the unbelieving world needs to set the standards for the secular instruction in schools operated by brethren. But most certainly, the unbelieving world ought not set the standards of qualification for the religious teaching that is done. Too many of those who teach in the Bible departments, while securing their degrees that the associations say they must have and which administrators seem to think is mandatory, have inhaled the liberal and modernistic philosophies taught them, more than most will admit.

As often as not, young people who have been trained in the home and the church to respect the Word of God as they ought are heard to state that the weakest departments regarding “the faith” on the campus is the Bible department, just where one ought to expect it to be the best. Teachers whose majors are in other fields than religion, but who are sound and faithful men and women, are more likely to adhere to the word than those who have “qualified” themselves in “religion” at the seminaries and schools where everything except truth is presented. We are very suspect of the Bible departments and the Bible professors because experience has taught us that over and over again false theories and doctrines are coming into the ranks of the church through just such sources. Again, there are exceptions. Unfortunately, we are convinced that the sound ones are the exceptions rather than the rule. This may sound harsh and very negative toward the Christian schools, but we might as well take our heads out of the sands of prejudice and stupidity and recognize the major source through which digression and apostasy has, does, and will come into the church.

Be Ever Alert

Even when parents send their children to the “Christian schools,” they need to be watchful and alert. Only God probably really knows what all will be taught as “truth” in the classes.

Is Christian education absolutely necessary to salvation? Yes;

Christian education is being educated in the knowledge and wisdom provided by the Lord through His Word. It is essential to salvation. Whether one attends a special school operated by brethren called a “Christian school” is certainly optional. It can be very helpful. It is too often very detrimental. For the most part, they are far superior in the things that matter than the secular schools operated by the state and the private unbelieving community, but they are not “heaven on earth.”

The home and the church must provide Christian education. Hopefully, the schools will help and not hinder. Knowledge of the will of the Lord cannot be dismissed if any person wants to live right and go to heaven.

† † † † †

The Preacher And His Pay

As sure as the night follows the day somebody will accuse preachers who talk about money for themselves as being a hireling, preaching for money, and all the other degrading judgments of his heart and motives when he says anything about it. Through the years many preachers have said very little to elderships with which we have worked on the subject of our salaries in order to avoid being accused of just such things. We have been intimidated by the tightwads and skinflints in the congregations to the point that we have allowed ourselves to be exploited and underpaid.

It is unfortunate that many brethren, including elderships, have so little regard for the ability, energy, sacrifice, training, insecurity, endurance and stress that goes with the work of being a regular preacher for a congregation. They consider him not much more than the light bill, gas bill, and other operating expenses and think they are being good stewards of their charge if they keep all money that goes to the preacher and his family at the minimum they can manage. While many in the congregation prosper, and preachers we have known have not been jealous of others' prosperity, brethren want the preacher to always get just “what you have to have to get by.” If it ever appears that the preacher may be getting ahead, you can be sure that somebody thinks he is overpaid. They would not dare apply such a standard to themselves.

So few consider how churches treat preachers financially. While many members have all kinds of extra benefits of insurance, retirements, furnished tools, clothing, and other equipment, who do they think supplies all of that for the preacher? Some have all of their business transportation provided them, but who buys the car, runs it, repairs it, wears it out in his work, and what it costs is seldom considered in the work of a preacher? While the church owns the house in which he lives, he is forced into a situation where he is doing nothing more than paying rent to brethren, and when he leaves, which could occur at the whim of just a handful of disgruntled sinners who whine to a fearful leadership, he never accumulates any property equity. Some of us have already purchased a house or two in our time, but the title still belongs to the brethren.

Some brethren must never consider the cost of a college education for a preacher's child. They labor under some misconception that he gets discounts, free this and that, and that is not true. He pays like everybody else. But with the support he receives he can barely make it even with his children working.

And when "old brother preacher" reaches the point where brethren prefer something young, dynamic, "on fire," they wish him well, and out he goes, probably with very little materially to use for his provision because he never had enough to make provision.

Yes, we are all aware of highly paid preachers, those who would gouge brethren for all they can get, who will "go along" with most anything if the pay is good, and they seek to please the suppliers of their salary rather than God. But what of that element of brethren, and they must be legion, who use these overpaid hirelings to castigate every hardworking and struggling faithful preacher?

There needs to be more consideration of preachers financially. When a boy out of high school with no special training at all can get a job driving a truck and make as much or more money in the course of a year delivering packages than a man can who had faithfully preached the gospel and accumulated decades of invaluable experience can receive for his support, something is dreadfully wrong, and too many times this is just the trouble—something is dreadfully wrong. Many brethren would not want to see their sons treated the way they are content to treat their preacher along these lines.

It is really not all that difficult to understand why many
(continued on page 16)

Between The Words Of Jesus

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business," (Luke 9:49). These are the first recorded words of Jesus in the Scriptures, spoken when He was but twelve years of age.

"It is finished." (John 19:30). These were the last recorded words of Jesus just before death on the cross of Calvary brought to an end His suffering.



JAMES W. BOYD

Have you ever stopped to think what a marvelous mission was accomplished by Jesus Christ between the utterance of these two phrases? Between them lies the work of Deity in the flesh in providing for the forgiveness of sin for an undeserving humanity. The will of His Father was the work He came to accomplish, and this He did. After three days and nights in the heart of the earth as He had prophesied, He came forth victorious over all that would destroy mankind. With that victory He offers to one and all salvation through Him.

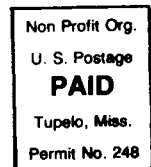
How acquainted are we with what He taught between these two statements? Seeing what He did on our behalf, do you not believe you should become better acquainted with the rest of His words?

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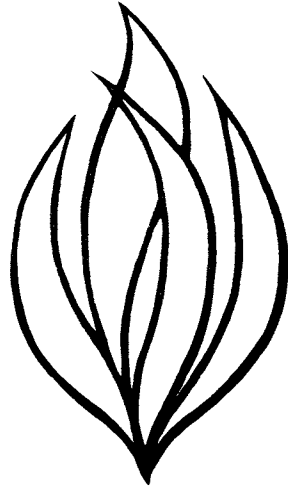
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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A Burning Fire



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



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The One Baptism

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:1-6.

Among other things, this passage emphasizes oneness. There are several things mentioned of which there is but one. Among those named is *“one baptism.”*

Seven Baptisms

At first, this may sound strange, inasmuch as the Bible mentions seven baptisms. Men, of course, have devised and invented many other baptisms in addition to the ones mentioned in the Scriptures. But even the Bible talks about seven baptisms. Yet, Paul says there is one. Our study is to search the Scriptures and learn what is the *“one baptism”* of which Paul speaks in Ephesians four.

We want to make this major point at the outset. Paul says there is *“one baptism.”* If Paul says there is one, then there cannot be two, or a half-dozen. He did not say there *was* one, but there *is* one. What *was*, and even what may yet be is not the object of our search but what *is*. Furthermore, when he says *one*, do any of us have difficulty in knowing just exactly how many he had in mind? If we accept, as we must, that there is one God, one Father, and one of everything else, we must accept there is but *one* baptism.

Unto Moses

In the Old Testament we read of the baptism unto Moses. It is not called a baptism in the Old Testament, but we read about it in the Old Testament and it is called a baptism in the New Testament. *“Moreover, brethren, I would not have you to be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”* (First Corinthians 10:1,2). This refers to

the deliverance of the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage as they crossed the Red Sea with water on either side and the cloud above them. They were immersed in the dual element of the cloud and the sea. This immersion is called baptism by the inspired Paul.

It is obvious that the baptism unto Moses was not the baptism to which Paul referred. The baptism unto Moses was in the past tense and occurred only once, pertaining exclusively to Israel.

Matthew 3:11,12, mentions three baptisms. *“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire, whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

Fire

There is the baptism of fire. It is a baptism that is administered by Christ, not man. It will occur when the Lord gathers into His garner His wheat, and the beginning of unquenchable fire. This will occur when there is the separation of the wheat from the chaff. It is similar to the judgment scene presented in Matthew 25, where there is mentioned everlasting fire. The baptism of fire is the description of the punishment of the lost. This is yet future. This is not the one baptism to which Paul pointed in Ephesians four.

John's Baptism

This passage also mentions the baptizing that was done in water by John the Baptist. The baptism preached and practiced by John was a part of the preparatory work he was ordained of God to do in making ready the coming of Christ. It was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:1-4). It pointed forward to the coming of Christ (Acts 19:1-5). It is obvious that after Christ had come and the plan of salvation in His name was in operation, that John's baptism ceased to be effective, and after Pentecost anyone baptized by John's baptism had to be baptized again in the name of Christ. Paul taught and practiced that very thing. (Acts 19:1-5). Since the baptism of John is no longer valid, it cannot be argued that John's baptism is the one baptism that Paul says "is" the one baptism.

There is another baptism mentioned in this passage that we shall consider later in the lesson.

Jesus Was Baptized

There are two baptisms that relate directly to Christ. Matthew 3:13-17, *“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me. And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straitway out of the water, and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

This baptism, even though at the hands of John, was not for the remission of sins. Jesus had no sins (First Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15). This baptism was *“to fulfill all righteousness.”*

The term *“righteousness”* here is like that in other places of the New Testament (Romans 1:16,17), and refers to God’s commandments. Psalm 119:172, *“All thy commandments are righteousness.”* We do not have the specific record when God commanded that this be done, but inasmuch as the baptism is said to be a fulfillment of that righteousness or commandment, we can know that somewhere, sometime, the Father had directed this to be accomplished, and Jesus was obedient to His Father in heaven. It provided the open and public forum for the Father’s announcement of the identity of Jesus. *“This is my beloved Son.”* It also marked the beginning of what is generally called the public ministry of Christ.

Suffering

Luke 12:50 presents to us a figurative use of the term baptism. *“But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”* The explanation of this terminology is found in reading Matthew 20:20-23, *“Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said,*

Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand, and on my left is not mine to give, but it shall be for them for whom it is prepared of my Father.”

The cup that Jesus was to drink was the cup of suffering. Matthew 26:39, *“O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”* Jesus was facing the suffering of the cross. He called it a cup to drink. He prayed that it might be spared him, but the Father’s will must be done. The cup was the cup of suffering, and the baptism of which he spoke to James and John, sons of Zebedee, also referred to that suffering beneath which he would be plunged and submerged.

Both of these baptisms related to Christ personally. He was the only one to die on the cross for the sins of men. Only He is the divine Son of God. Neither of these two are the one baptism. There remain but two others, one of which must, if even by elimination, be the one baptism of Ephesians four.

Holy Spirit

Let us now consider the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The subject is a very extensive one, but a few words can lead us to know whether or not this is the one baptism of Paul.

We read from Matthew, chapter three, where John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Not only did John foretell this but also the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28). Jesus had promised His apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). It is also recorded that Jesus said, *“...but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence.”* (Acts 1:5). He told His apostles to tarry in Jerusalem and wait for the power to come, and identified that power as the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

This event took place on the first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit overpowered and immersed the apostles, covering them with divine power. They began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance. They were inspired of God in what they said. This was not a baptism that was commanded of them, but one that was promised to them. It was not that for which they were to

pray, but was given in fulfillment of the Lord's promise. It was promised only to the apostles, administered by Christ, not men. They were guided in presenting and revealing the truth of God infallibly. It enabled them, as the recipients of this baptism, to perform miracles and to lay hands on others that imparted this power to others to perform miracles. (Acts 8:17; 19:6). Such was a work that was exclusively theirs and belonged to no other (Acts 8:19-21). It was for the purpose of confirming the word that they preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4).

If there be those who are baptized of the Holy Spirit today as some claim, there ought to be the demonstration of such power as was given to the apostles, both in their miracles, their revelation of the Word, and the impartation of such power to others. But all three matters are significantly lacking among those today.

The truth is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was upon the ones to whom it was promised, the apostles, and no other. Even the events at the household of Cornelius were not identical with that of Pentecost, and to call that event a second baptism of the Holy Spirit is to assign it a significance that is not to be proven by Scripture. The purpose of the Holy Spirit baptism, the people of the Holy Spirit baptism, the action of the Holy Spirit baptism is not among men today as then. The revealed and confirmed Word, of course, still abides.

Men have added many other baptisms, so called, since the Bible was completed. They have substitutions for what the Scripture demands, and have meanings for these things for which the Scripture gives no authority. Sprinkling and pouring are not scriptural baptism. *Triune* baptism is no scriptural baptism. Baptism to join a denomination is unheard of and baptism to show you have already been saved is false to the core. Infant baptism has no Biblical authority. All such things are digressions from the truth. *Lordship* baptism is another misnomer. To be baptized confessing that Jesus is your Lord is nowhere found in Scripture. Some today who have been baptized for the remission of sins are now undergoing what is called *Lordship* baptism. Such is another digression.

The One Baptism

The command to be baptized still stands today. It is significant that the baptism that was being preached and practiced at the time when Paul said there is one baptism was baptism in water,

in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, as the entrance into Christ, whereupon God adds one to His church. (Acts 8:36; 10:47,48; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:47). This was in conformity with the condition that was given by Jesus (Mark 16:16). That command has not changed and still abides today. This is the baptism that is taught and obeyed even now. Those that love the Lord will obey His will (John 14:15).

By this baptism one becomes a member of the body of Christ (First Corinthians 12:13). It is administered by men as Jesus directed (Matthew 28:19). It is not in connection with a second baptism, the Holy Spirit baptism, for then there would be two baptisms, whereby Paul has said there *is* one.

Every example of conversion revealed in the New Testament under the authority of Christ, beginning at Pentecost has concluded with baptism because that is the point of leaving the sinful world and entering Christ (Romans 6:3,4). We urge all men to obey this baptism.

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Partakers Of The Divine Nature

Second Peter 1:5-8, reads, *“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to your 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.”*

This familiar list of characteristics is often called the Christian virtues. They are some of the qualities that Christians are expected to develop in their own lives and character. The American Standard version begins this passage, *“Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part...”* the various qualities. For what cause? This is an important point in our lesson. There is good reason and cause for adding these qualities to our lives. Look at the verses immediately before this passage and we find the reason for adding these qualities. *“Whereby are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises; that by these ye*

might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (Verse 4).

Faith

Peter was addressing those who had obtained a *“like precious faith”* with him. Peter was in close fellowship with Christ. Peter had the privilege of having seen the Christ while He was here on earth. Those to whom Peter was writing had not been so blessed, but they believed on the basis of the evidence revealed unto them. They had *“the knowledge of God and of Jesus the Lord.”* They both knew the Father and Son.

Furthermore, Peter states that the Father had given unto *“us.”* This refers to the apostles and to others who received these things through their preaching, *“all things that pertain to life and godliness.”* Everything that related to eternal life with God had been taught them. By having the knowledge that they had of Christ, they had everything that was needed to get right, stay right and be right with God.

Promises

They were also the recipients of *“great and precious promises”* that had come through Christ. By developing these qualities, these Christian virtues, they would become more and more in the character likeness of Deity. Through Christ they had escaped the corruption of the sinful world, and by becoming more and more like Him they would be partakers of *“the divine nature.”* This does not mean they would become Deity. It means, as we sometimes sing, they would become *“more and more like Jesus.”*

“Yea, and for this very cause...” because of their precious faith, because of the blessings through Christ, because they had received what they needed to be right with God, because of the precious promises extended to them through Christ, because they had escaped sin’s defilements, because they could become more and more like God in character, they were to add these character qualities to their lives, heart, mind, and actions. This is the reason and the motivation for adding these virtues.

These qualities do not just happen to become ours. There is something we must do to possess them. They are available to us for the developing.

We do not add just one quality at a time. All these qualities

are added simultaneously. It is a process of growth. Just as one does not first grow a leg to mature size, and then grow the arm to full size, then grow a foot, etc. but all parts grow simultaneously and together, so these qualities are added to our characters as we grow spiritually. Actually what we are considering in this passage is the matter of growth as a child of God. Having been born into the family, we are to grow. These are the ways where growth is expected.

Diligence

Consider the quality of diligence. This is the very opposite of slothfulness and careless indifference. "Hit or miss" Christianity is really not the Lord's faith at all. We are to give close attentiveness to Christian living. We are to be watchful and alert, wide awake, lest the devil overtake us. We know the value of diligence in business, driving a car, in walking across a wide chasm. Brethren, we are as someone who is walking over a narrow bridge over the open jaws of hell. Therefore, we must be diligent.

Courage

In our faith we are to supply or add virtue. This term means manliness and courage. It reflects a disposition to stand for what is right against all opposition. It means holding firm to faithful and true convictions. David said to Solomon, "*Be strong and show thyself a man.*" What good advice every child should receive.

The lack of courage has contributed to the fall of many. Demas fell in the weakness of love for this world. When members of the church, whether young or old, compromise and surrender their faith and convictions in order to be accepted by people of the world, they reveal a lack of the very quality Peter admonishes here. Joshua showed virtue when he withstood the ten faithless spies and said Israel could take the land of Canaan. He demonstrated it again when he said, "*As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.*" Paul expressed virtue when he commented, "*I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*"

Cowards cannot fight the good fight successfully. Truth cannot be upheld by the hands of the timid and afraid. God needs strong and courageous children to do His bidding on this earth. Be one of them.

Knowledge

Add knowledge. Some knowledge is necessary in order to become a Christian. More knowledge is needed in order to be a Christian day after day. Christ urged, *“Take my yoke upon you and learn of me...”* (Matthew 11:29). Hosea mourned the agonies of God, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee.”* In spite of this, we see so-called, nominal “Christians” ignore the opportunities to know more perfectly the will of the Lord. We see them neglect adding knowledge of truth to their lives. *“Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:32). But we need not expect the freedom when we refuse to glean the knowledge.

Just as a babe must physically have nourishment to survive and grow, so must the one born into the kingdom have spiritual supplies. As the children of God we are to feed upon the *“sincere milk of the word.”* We are expected to press on so that we can take meat and be strong. It is a command to grow. *“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* (Second Peter 3:18). So many members of the church are disobedient to this command and float through life as if it really did not matter that much. Did not the Lord in Hebrews 5:12 rebuke the Christians who did not grow in knowledge as they should?

Self-control

Then there is the quality of temperance or self-control. It is unfortunate that some think of temperance only in terms of the use of alcoholic beverages and usually miss the point there. Some think it means they can drink a little bit. Temperance means self-control. The Christian will have such control of himself and will abstain from evil, even the appearance thereof. It is not self-control to indulge in something wrong even a little bit. Moderation, self-control, or temperance means refraining from evil altogether, and doing what is acceptable in moderation.

It is intemperate to swear at all, lie at all, drink alcoholic beverages at all, overeat at all, smoke at all, commit adultery at all, etc. It is sinful to curse and use profanity at all. You cannot do such things moderately and temperately. Such things are themselves intemperate. Self-control is what is needed to

abstain. One cannot lose his temper a little bit and be as he ought. Control is the order.

Patience

We must add patience to our lives. The term patience is often misunderstood for self-control. It is obvious that many of us display a lack of self-control in pressing situations and we say that we lack patience. But the term used here means steadfastness and faithfulness. It is not a symptom of passive non-resistance, complacency or serenity. Nor is it the same as indifference. Sometimes what some call patience is nothing other than lethargy and a “don’t care” attitude.

James reminded us of the patience of Job (James 5:11). As one surveys the book of Job he notes that there were times when Job got very aroused and lashed out. He might have displayed a small amount of lack of self-control, but he is an example of patience. He said, “*Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him.*” (Job 13:15). He would not curse God and die. He would cease to be faithful to God regardless what hardships came upon him. He knew that giving up on God was never the way to follow. He was steadfast in his faith, unwavering in his confidence in God. This is the real meaning of patience. It might be best defined as “keeping on keeping on.” Patience is certainly put to the test when times are difficult and the discouragements frequent under adverse circumstances. God is easy to serve when all goes well. But the patient Christian will serve God at all times, every time, and regardless of the times.

Godliness

The Christian is to add godliness to his character. Again, this word like the word *patience* is often misunderstood because of its similarity to the word *godlikeness*. But it means reverence, respect, piety toward God.

How the world lacks respect for the Almighty! But the child of God has reverence for things sacred and holy. He is not like a swine who will trample underfoot that which is precious. He will not abuse the things of God. He does not profane what God has made holy. Rather, he has respect and stands in awe of the power and majesty of God, honoring His name, His laws, loving what God loves and hating what God hates.

Godliness must be taught to the young. They will not hold

things in reverence unless they are taught that which is to be so held. When the young see those who are older speak and act disparagingly toward things that deserve honor and reverence, what can you expect from them except the same kind of godless behavior? The Christian is a pious man, giving reverence to God and all things that pertain unto Him.

Kindness

Brotherly kindness is to characterize the Christian also. This is the special love he is to have toward his brothers and sisters in Christ. Genuine love will manifest itself in word and deed, in consideration and concern. Love will not produce injury and harm, as is often done through gossip, slander, and false accusation. But it will produce help in time of need, bearing one another's burdens, quick to forgive, ready to protect.

Brotherly love is displayed and enjoyed in the good fellowship that brethren have as they journey through life, working together in the cause of the Lord. When one is sick, his brethren are attentive. Whether in times of good fortune or trouble, the Christian should be able to count on his brethren to rejoice with him or weep with him. The greetings one to another are warm, sincere, heartfelt. This is because the tie that binds in Christian love is a tie that is stronger even than fleshly ties. It should be an ongoing project of every child of the Lord to build a disposition toward brethren that is the kind of love that the Lord wants among those of His family, the church.

Love

The last quality Peter names is love. Certainly love is embodied in brotherly kindness, but love even extends beyond the limits of the brotherhood. God loves all people, and so should we. God does not approve of all people, and neither are we expected to do so. But "seeking the other's highest good" is the quality of love, and this is what God wants of us.

So much is said about love today, and too often nothing more is meant than an emotional, almost gooey nothingness and wordy mush. Deeds reflect real love, not mere talk. Paul writes that if we have not love, then whatever else we may have suffers and is in vain (First Corinthians 13).

R. L. Whiteside wrote in *Sound Doctrine*, page 164, volume 2, "It is possible for us to become selfish in our love for the

church and to develop a sort of family pride. Such a one does not think of leading men to Christ for their own sakes and because they need salvation, but he thinks of the world as a quarry out of which he may extract material to help build up the church and make it greater and more glorious. But the Christian must outgrow that trait; he must cultivate love for men and seek to reclaim them from sin and ruin because he loves them. Hence, to brotherly love add universal love.”

By adding these things to our own hearts and lives, we become more as the Lord above would have us be. We become more like Him. We become partakers of the nature that is characteristic of Deity.

It might be a good way to bring this discussion to a close by simply asking, and let each ask of himself, “How are we doing in growing along these matters?”

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Father, Forgive Them

The only way for sins to be covered is that they are forgiven by the Lord (Romans 4:7,8). Jesus came to this low life of sin and sorrow for the specific purpose of bringing salvation and forgiveness of sins (Matthew 1:21). His life was a giant emphasis on forgiveness, as is evidenced by His words of forgiveness and His teaching concerning it. His death on the cross provided the sin-removing blood by which the sins of men are forgiven.

As our Lord was on the cross, His attitude toward those that chose to sin against Him was that of a willingness to forgive (Luke 23:34). So must be our attitude (Matthew 6:15). To withhold forgiveness from anyone who seeks it is to seal our own spiritual doom (Matthew 18:35).

When we understand the wages of sin means an eternal separation from God, a hell to be suffered without end, our hearts and voices cry out for forgiveness. We want our sins forgiven. We cannot successfully cover them ourselves. We need the Savior God has provided.

It should be our prayer that all who sin will conform to the conditions of forgiveness, one of which is to possess a forgiving spirit.

JWB

Jesus Washes His Disciples Feet

The text for this lesson is John 13:1-17. It is the record of an event during the week just prior to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It tells of happenings during a very trying period of the Lord's earthly sojourn.

The assembly in the upper room was the last assembly the Lord had with His chosen apostles before His death. After this followed the Garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal by Judas, the series of unjust and vicious "trials," and eventually the cross. Christ was aware of what was before Him, "*knowing that his hour was come that He should depart.*"

We must keep in mind how difficult this assembly must have been for Jesus. He deeply loved His apostles and counted heavily on them. He had been in such close association with them for the past three to three and a half years. They had been together under many and varying conditions. Any final gathering with loved ones is emotional; goodbyes come hard. These men were the closest to Jesus on earth. Later He would pray fervently for them. He knew what mockery, scourging, blasphemy, ridicule, physical pain and shame awaited Him. His apostles did not, and could not at this time, grasp the awesomeness of the entire proceedings. Surely, all these things were in His heart as He rose to perform the service of washing the feet of His disciples, teaching them a lesson that they, as well as we, needed.

Jesus, The Servant

Instead of being comforted by others in this agonizing period of His life, He took the towel and basin and rendered the humble task that was usually performed only by servants.

Among the heavy burdens within the heart of our Lord was the problem among His disciples. There was evidence of greed, covetousness, and other evil in the heart of Judas. The Lord loved Judas, but the heart of Judas was evil. It proved to be fertile soil into which Satan sowed the seeds of disloyalty and betrayal that turned Judas into one of the most reprehensible people of whom we read in the Bible.

Who Is Greatest?

Another problem, and is some ways even a bigger one, was the distracting concern among the rest of the disciples as to whom would be the greatest among them. While Jesus walked with them, He was their leader but now that He was going away they became concerned about who would be chief, and each seemed to have desire for position. Jealousy was working its way into their hearts, and all this at a time when they should have had no concern for themselves but very much interest and compassion for Jesus.

This was not the first time that this problem had arisen among them. Matthew 20:20-28 reads, *“Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. 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.”* The problem of rank was raised by the mother of James and John. The result of this ambition was *“strife among them.”* (Luke 22:24).

Strife and jealousy can work its ugly head into the body of Christ today if we are careless and indifferent about keeping a check on it. This was doubtless part of the problem with Diotrefes of whom we read in Third John 9, *“who loveth to have the preeminence among them.”* Such an attitude can only create division. Pride surely grieves the Lord as much now as then. The manners of much of the religious world caters to and

fosters such strife by giving ecclesiastical titles like Reverend, Father, Excellency, etc. The same is true with the wearing of robes and parading before others in a public fashion. Such is more like the Pharisees than Christians. (Matthew 23 :5-12).

Custom

It was the custom in that land that before the meal was served, as an act of hospitality, the host or one of his servants, would wash the feet of his guests. They wore sandals and the dust upon their feet made this needful, as well as a refreshing action. But Jesus and His disciples were in the room that belonged to another who was not present. None of the disciples assumed the role. None rendered the work of a servant. All considered themselves as guests. To have done otherwise would have admitted a role of inferior rank, which was incompatible with their ambitions to be counted the greatest.

Christ had taught His disciples who would be the greatest. *"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:4). We have already read Matthew 20:26-28. Luke records, *"But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth."* (Luke 22:26,27). Even though He was Master of all, He bows before each one and performs the humble and menial task of a servant.

At first Peter objected. He evidently had grasped the point that the disciples had erred and refused to let the Lord wash his feet. But Jesus said, *"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me."* It was plain that Jesus wished to teach this lesson to all who were present and it would be wrong to refuse to allow Him to do so. Peter then quickly submitted (John 13:9).

What Was It?

When Jesus had completed the literal washing, He asked, *"Know ye what I have done to you?"* (John 13:12-15). It was obvious to all that He had washed their feet. It is obvious to us that Jesus had something else in mind other than the literal washing of the feet of His disciples. He was not teaching the act of "foot washing" as some kind of religious ceremony. Rather

He was teaching them the lesson they all so desperately needed, particularly in view of their contentions about who would be the greatest. He was teaching them humility, service, the unacceptability of arrogant pride and the desire for position among brethren. He was condemning self-exaltation and commending service. There is nothing in the text to indicate that He was establishing some kind of religious rite and ordinance that was to be a part of worshipping God, as some claim. Foot washing, then and now, is an act of service and hospitality. Whenever we read of it in Scripture it was such an act. It was not this actual practice that Jesus taught, but He was teaching something designed to correct a blight and blemish in the character of His disciples, and something that can mar our characters also if we fail to learn.

Sin Of Pride

Proverbs 16:18,19, *"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud."* Proverbs six tells us of six things, yea seven that the Lord hates. The very first one mentioned is *"a proud look."* *"A man's pride shall bring him low; but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit."* (Proverbs 29:23). *"And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms, saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him, and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place, and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* (Luke 14:7-11).

James said, *"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."* Paul admonished, *"Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits."* (Romans 12:16). Earlier he had written, *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..."* (Romans 12:3). *"Let*

nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” (Philippians 2:3,4).

Such then is the teaching of Jesus Christ by this event. The qualities of humility and service are qualities that are admitted by the Lord, taught of God, and are to become a part of the Christian’s manner of life. It all begins by humbling our will to Him.

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(continued from page 23)

The Bible student will remember that with the passing of years, the coming of famines, Joseph and his brothers met once again. When the identity of the powerful distributor of grain in Egypt was realized by the brothers to actually be their brother Joseph, a thrilling and emotional story is told.

“God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” Gen. 45:7.

Preservation of the family of Jacob could not be accomplished in Canaan due to the famine that extended over many years. So Joseph looked upon his ordeals, and they were difficult, as God using him to accomplish God’s purposes in preserving Israel. He considered himself but a tool in God’s hand.

Another great example of the character of Joseph that we will do well to imitate is what happened after the death of Jacob. The brothers feared retaliation from Joseph. But Joseph said, *“Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”* (Genesis 50:19,20). Joseph consented to the providence of God, forgave his brothers, and rejoiced in his opportunities to accomplish good in spite of what others had done against him.

Shall we do less when the hardships of being faithful to God overtake us? We know not all the workings of God’s providence but we are assured of His providence nonetheless. If we keep a Joseph-like attitude toward all things that come our way, we shall do good for ourselves and those around us, possibly even for those who have acted toward us like Joseph’s brothers acted toward him.

JWB

The Antediluvian World

The word “antediluvian” means before the great flood in the days of Noah. It has reference to that period of time between the creation and that flood recorded in Genesis. Just exactly how long a period that was we are not in a position to be certain and dogmatic. The Bible does not give us a date of the creation or the age and antiquity of man. It does not tell us how long the earth has existed. We place ourselves in an unnecessary and complicated situation to try to assign a certain number of years for this period.

Let us hasten to add, however, that this admission is not an allowance for the millions and millions of years that evolutionists like to say that the earth, the universe, etc. has existed. Scientific evidence contradicts such extended periods of time. The theory of uniformitarianism is not a valid one, because it denies such events as the flood itself, even creation, or any other miraculous intervention on the part of God. It is a concoction of unbelievers that is designed to prop up the unproven and unprovable hypothesis of evolution as the explanation for the origin of man and denial of God and man’s accountability to Him. The existence of the earth is more likely in the neighborhood of ten thousand years, but we have no obligation to specify such things.

Usshur’s calendar has given a period of approximately 1,700 years to this antediluvian period, but we are not Biblically obligated to defend this figure. The calculation is based on the genealogies listed in the Scriptures, but failed to take into account the skips in genealogies that often takes place because the genealogies were not designed to necessarily denote each generation, but only the lineage involved; but this is an irrelevant matter in our discussion.

Like most any other period of history, we find good things and evil things. But we need to note some of the characteristics of mankind in that age as the Bible reveals them.

Contrary to the assertions of evolutionists, early man was not more animal than human, not a savage, not a wild man. So often we are provided the hypothetical pictures and drawings from the imaginations of unbelievers regarding the early appearance of man, and man is made to appear little more than an animal, not quite human. But the Bible says man was created

an intelligent, sane, complete creature. Atheistic or theistic evolution either one denies the Scriptures and there is absolutely no harmony between them. To accept the Darwinian theory of evolution, that man was beast and is now highly developed, is to deny the Word of God. Such a hypothesis is neither Biblically or scientifically compatible with what mankind can and does know. True enough, some of the descendants of early man seem to act more like savages than humans, but that is because of sin. And you do not have to go back into history to find examples of such degenerate conduct. Just look around the society of which we all are members and you will see examples of this sorry condition with many.

Human Skills

When God created man, He made man superior to everything of His creation and gave him superiority over all things. Man was created in the spiritual image of God, full-grown, with talents, abilities, intelligence, capacities and knowledge. Even before the flood, man had attained considerable skills and a high degree of civilization.

Men were herdsmen like Jabal, father of tent dwellers and those that had cattle. There were musicians, like Jubal, the father of all who handle the harp and pipe. There were metallurgists, workers of metal, like Tubal-Cain, and instructor of every artificer in brass and iron. There were builders like Cain, who built a city and named it Enoch, after his son. Farmers existed and even Adam knew how to till the earth and make his livelihood therefrom. There are manifold evidences showing early man before the flood to be highly skilled, civilized, with knowledge and ability. Even Noah had great abilities, sufficient to build the ark. Certainly mankind was not as mechanized as now. Many things have been learned and discovered through the centuries of man's existence, but to think that our ancestors were mere animals, savages, beasts of the field, without any refinement, culture, or such things, is to degrade the race with nonsense. Our earliest foreparents could speak, communicate, not just grunt and act silly to convey their intents and messages as we are sometimes led to believe by those who prefer to think of their fathers as brute beasts.

Long Life

Characteristic of this antediluvian period was the longevity of life. Adam lived 930 years; Seth lived 912 years. Methusaleh lived 969 years, the longest life that is recorded. Some have contended that such was not possible. Why was it not possible? Is it just because it does not occur now? All things are possible with God. There is no reason to consider these long periods of life to be anything except literal designations of the time these people lived. God's Word, having been verified, confirmed, proven, tells us how long they lived and we prove ourselves fools whenever we try to show that God is ignorant and did not know whereof He spoke.

We do not profess to know why God allowed those people to live so long. That does not matter. He may have wanted them to live long so as to populate the earth. The world then may not have been as infected with disease. It may have been to expand civilization. Whatever, we do not attempt to second guess God. We believe His Word.

There are those who are always so anxious to appease and compromise with the skeptic and contend that the "years" really only meant "months." This would make Methusaleh only about 80 years old, which is more to their human reasoning. But if that be true, then Jared was only five months old when he fathered a child, for he fathered a son at 65. This reduces the attempted compromise to the absurdity. When there is no reason to relegate Biblical statements to the symbolic and figurative, we do the Word injustice to attempt it. As usual, man's rationalizations of what he does not understand produces far more complications than acceptance of God's Word ever produced. True enough, people do not live as long as before the flood. What changes in the world's environment were produced by the flood, or what changes God may have instigated then, remains unknown.

Sin

The antediluvian period is very well known for its sinfulness. The first sin was in the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve in disobedience to God. We read of Cain's murder of Abel, resulting from his jealousy and envy. We read of presumptuous worship by Cain. We read of the ever-growing rebellion by mankind against God, with lies, neglect of personal responsibilities, polygamy, immorality of various forms, evil marriages, until the Scripture records, *"that every imagination of the*

thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5). Once the floodgate of sin was opened, the devastation of sin and the weakness of man to resist temptation plunged man into spiritual and physical ruin.

Now and again we read of noblemen during that period like Enoch, who “*walked with God.*” There was also Noah who “*found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*” But these are the exceptions.

Lamech is the first man to be recorded to violate God’s intent concerning marriage, having two wives (Genesis 4:19). The result of all these transgressions was, “*And it repented God that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart...And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.*” (Genesis 6:6,12). Genesis 6:11 tells us that “*the earth was filled with violence.*” This certainly contributed to the necessity of destruction of such a magnitude of wickedness by the flood. Man’s misuse of power and the exploitation of his blessings, made violence commonplace.

The extent of this evil is described in Genesis 6:5, as we have read. It is beyond ability to adequately picture the corrupt society, not in part but the whole, with minor exceptions.

What should be sobering to us today, but which is dismissed by most is that these same sins are running rampant in the world even yet.

Warnings

When God saw the situation, God warned the antediluvian world. Although they were wicked, undeserving, and sinful, God was concerned for them as He has always been for the souls of people. Sacred history records their punishment, but not without having had opportunity to repent. Noah is called a “*preacher of righteousness.*” (Second Peter 2:5). He was described as a “*perfect man,*” not without any fault, but blameless, without reproach, whole, complete and mature before God. Through Noah the Spirit of God did strive with man (Genesis 6:3). Hebrews 11:7 says Noah “*condemned the world,*” warning of the destruction impending due to sin. Indications are that this man of faith (Hebrews 11:7) spent 120 years warning his fellow beings of God’s wrath, but to no avail except his own family. God was longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but there came a time when the longsuffering

of God expired and He ceased His persuasion through Noah. He executed His justice and wrath against the wicked generations in the form of the flood.

Worship

During this antediluvian period, there was worship of God through sacrifices, using altars, other activities that were done “*by faith*,” which indicates that God’s Word was given to them (Romans 10:17). Worship has characterized every period of human history. At no time has God left man without instructions of how to worship Him. Unfortunately, history shows and the present reaffirms, that so many pay so little attention to what God wants, preferring to do things they like, their own way.

From a survey of this span of human history as given from the Bible, we can observe several significant matters: (1) In the creation, God’s power and provision for man is evident. The rank that God gave to man was to be his blessings, but man dissipated it through sin. (2) We see God’s displeasure with sin, and His wrath against the sinner. (3) We see the longsuffering of God, His kindness, His grace and favor toward Noah, His concern for all mankind. But we see that such has its limits. (4) We observe the results of man’s continued rebellion against God and His refusal to repent and live God’s way. (5) We can be encouraged that a righteous life can be lived even in a perverse generation. Noah was even able to save his own family under the worst kind of circumstances. (6) We can note, that even though we live in a different age and dispensation, we serve the same God. They worshipped, and we are to worship, even though not the same way. They had to believe and obey to be spared, and we must believe and obey to be spiritually spared. They, for the most part, failed and were punished. We, if we also fail, shall be punished.

Salvation

First Peter 3:20 teaches that Noah was saved “*by water*.” Having heard God’s warning, being given God’s instructions concerning the ark, obeying what God said because he believed God, the water, rather than being the means of his destruction as was the case with the wicked, was the means of his salvation, lifting up the ark, Noah and his family, to safety.

First Peter 3:21 reads, “*The like figure whereunto even*

baptism doth now also save us [not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God] by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Baptism involves water. Obviously, water baptism was under consideration here, else where would have been no need to explain that it was not a mere washing of the body. In spite of all of the denials by the denominationalists and the “dry cleaners” of the religious world, the Bible teaches that we are saved by water, even by baptism. So it reads and so shall it remain, and so shall we preach and so ought men obey.

The earth, and all that is therein shall again be destroyed, but not by water. God promised there would not be another flood like that which ended the antediluvian age. If the flood had been a local flood as some have contended, then God has violated His own promise because there have been many local floods since the days of Noah. The flood was a universal, earth-covering flood. Next time God will destroy the earth by fire (Second Peter 3). It is inevitable and predestined.

Are we ready for that day to come? Without warning (Matthew 24:37-39) and at a time we cannot know in advance, the end shall come and the judgment shall be. Will we have given God’s Word any more respect than those of the antediluvian period? Or shall we be destroyed as well?

† † † † †

The Difference Was Attitude

A study of accepted Bible characters is one of the richest sources of material for character improvement one can find. Few surpass that great Old Testament character named Joseph. He provides us with a multitude of commendable examples. For instance, focus attention on how he viewed the sins committed against him by his brothers.

In the book of Genesis we read how the brothers of Joseph took him and sold him as a slave into Egypt. They were envious and jealous of him and realized they could not cope with him unless they did some underhanded deed against him. So they seized him and sent him away.

(continued on page 17)

One Glory Of The Church

Ephesians 3:10, “*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*” Our emphasis is on the phrase, “*by the church.*”

The Old Testament contains many prophecies concerning the kingdom of God, which is the church (Colossians 1:13; Matthew 16:16-19). While those who subscribe to the false theory of pre-millennialism contend that Christ failed to establish the kingdom and provided a hastily conceived substitute with the church until He returns the next time to set up His kingdom, the Bible teaches the church was God’s intent “*before the foundation of the world.*” (Ephesians 1:4). It exists according to His eternal purpose (Ephesians 1:11).

The glory of the church we now emphasize is that the very existence of the church makes known, demonstrates, the manifold wisdom of God. It is true that the church is to make the gospel message known to the world and is the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). But our text teaches how the existence of the church tells us something of God and His wisdom.

Keep in mind, God promised Abraham that of His seed would come One who would be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:3; 18:18). That seed is Christ (Galatians 3:16). The saved belong to Christ and are those that make up the church (Acts 2:47). The intent and wise plan of God to save mankind is observable and demonstrated by the existence of saved people, the ones who compose the church that Christ saves (Ephesians 5:23).

This teaching refutes forever the idea that one can be saved outside of the church, that church membership is optional, that it does not matter to which church one belongs. All such teaching has come from the minds of men as they strive to justify what cannot be harmonized with Scripture. If people would make as much effort to learn the will of God as they do to “discover” ways that God already accepts whatever is among men, then there would be respect for the church, and denominationalism would die overnight.

One glory of the church is that God has declared its composition to be saved people and it stands as undeniable evidence of His wisdom. Indeed, the church is a glorious church.

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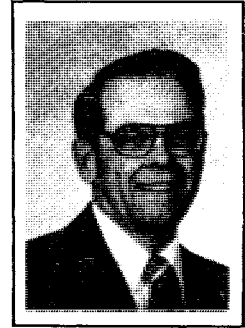
It Is Better Hidden

There is no justification for hypocrisy. If there was anything our Lord considered contemptible it was the pretended and feigned righteousness some outwardly displayed, but were "*whited sepulchres, full of deed men's bones.*"

But there is no offense to good morals to contend that society is better served when the evil of the wicked are concealed rather than paraded openly and shamelessly.

The flaunting of wickedness, as if there is some kind of virtue in being a servant of the devil openly instead of secretly, is to ignore the corrupting influence of evil upon others, especially those in their young and formative years.

If someone is determined to consume alcoholic beverages, commit fornication, lie, steal, or some other of the many forms of sinful behavior, he does eternal spiritual damage to his own soul. But if he commits his transgressions in hiding, even though his damnation is certain, at least he will not be influencing others to the same spiritual devastation. There are some things better left unsaid openly and undone publicly even if disrespect for God is under deceptive concealment.



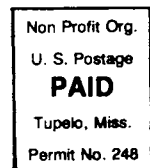
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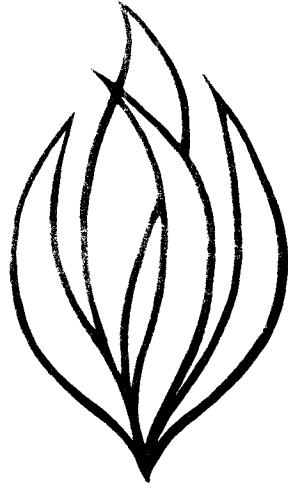
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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**EAST MAIN CHURCH OF CHRIST
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A Burning Fire



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



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The Way Home

There is something thrilling and wonderful in the thoughts of home. "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." We may go away from home for a while, even on a most pleasurable experience, visiting friends and loved ones, enjoying a vacation or a trip, but we are glad to get home again. We like to think of home, and the many wonderful memories concerning home and those who inhabit it.

Our lesson now centers on the thoughts of home, but not our earthly homes, but the most wonderful home of all, the heavenly home. For the Christian, this earth is not our home, at least not our permanent home. It is but a temporary one for a short while at the longest. Life is but a vapor that will soon be finished, and if not finished, it will come to a stop nonetheless. We are just passing through this domain on our way to another land, on our way home. "*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims...*" (First Peter 2:11). We are but sojourners, as the "*man goeth to his long home.*" (Ecclesiastes 12:5). Paul wrote, "*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.*" (Second Corinthians 5:1,2). We are striving for that better destination and as Abraham, looking for that city whose builder and maker is God.

We sing the song that says, "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land." Heaven is that home for which we long. But certain things are required of us to go home to heaven.

The Desire

To go home to heaven one must earnestly desire to go there. The way that some seem to live their lives indicate that they would not want to live in heaven even if they could. Their desires and ambitions are not on heavenly matters. They will have to change their likes and dislikes before they would enjoy heavenly fellowship.

Abraham desired a better country (Hebrews 11:9,10). At the

death of his infant son, David expressed the desire to go and be with him (Second Samuel 12:23). Few words express the desire for heaven more adequately than those of Paul in Philippians 1:23,24, *“But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ for it is very far better.”*

When I was a young child I wondered at the statements I sometimes heard from older people as they talked about the time of their death. They did not look upon it with a dread and fear, but almost with a sense of anticipation and a pleasure to come. Some actually looked forward to it because they had such a hard time in this life. As I grow older, I have not even yet been fully able to grasp that sense and attitude toward departing from this world, but I can see more clearly why some would desire to leave the toils of the road, the cares, the pain and suffering, the difficulties, and depart to be with the saved eternally, which included many loved ones who had gone on before them. But there must be a desire to go to heaven. Possibly some do not have a sufficient desire and therefore will not succeed.

I heard a rather humorous story about having sufficient motivation and desire to accomplish something. In England the graves are dug ten feet deep, and not only are graves found in cemeteries, but other places. An educator died and his grave was dug on the campus where he had taught. The evening before the funeral, one lad was crossing the campus in the dark and fell into the grave. The depth of it made it impossible for him to be able to get out however hard he tried. So he resigned himself to sit in a corner and wait for the dawn to bring help. By chance another lad was walking the same area and also fell into the same open grave, unaware of the first occupant in one dark corner. The second lad jumped and jumped and tried to get out, but was making no headway. Finally, the first boy said, “It’s no use trying, because you can’t get out.” Hearing those words from a source unknown he suspected the worst and he leaped from the grave with a single bound. You might say that he had been sufficiently motivated and had a strong desire to get out. Maybe that is what more of us need; namely, a stronger desire for heaven to be our home.

The Decision

To go to heaven, one must decide to go there. He will not just accidentally come upon it. And actually, it is amazing that man is given the opportunity to make such a decision. Life is filled

with the making of decisions, some of which are rather insignificant, but many are so important, life-forming, even determining our eternal destiny. Some of the more momentous decisions we make in life are where we shall live, our means of livelihood, who we shall marry, etc. But the most important decision of all of one's existence is, "What shall I do concerning Christ?" To refuse to decide to live in Christ and for Christ is to decide not to go to heaven. This we shall emphasize later in the lesson. But the necessity of making decisions are a part of living.

God pleads with us to decide for Christ. He urged the people before the flood of Noah to turn from their wickedness by the preaching of Noah (Genesis 6:3; Second Peter 2:5). Even now, we are invited to come to Christ (Revelation 22:17). The Lord does not want any to perish (Second Peter 3:7). If anyone is lost it will be because they have decided to be lost rather than saved.

The making of this decision is a very personal matter and a personal responsibility. None can decide for me. Others may encourage and instruct me, but each one must act in obedience to God for himself. We can help one another prepare for heaven, but each must make his own preparation. We have to choose whom we shall serve (Joshua 24:15).

There is an old song that asks the question, "What will Christ do with me?" That depends on what I do with Christ.

One Way

There is but one way to go to make heaven our home and that way is Christ. There is no other. "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). "*Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12). There is only one Lord (Ephesians 4:4,5). We all must walk by the same one rule (Philippians 3:16). The gate is strait, the way is narrow (Matthew 7:13,14). We either go that way or we do not go.

Some have mistakenly accepted the idea that there are many ways to reach heaven and we can choose whatever way we prefer. We must choose to go the way that God has prescribed. "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Proverbs 14:12). As another great and grand song of worship states, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross, there's no other way but this." Such is the teaching of Ephesians 2:16. It is the way of the cross that

leads home.

What is another amazing and wonderful thought is that the way home is simple and understandable. It is not complicated, mystical, or beyond our reach. This is not to suggest that the way is always easy to travel. Actually, the opposite is often the case. But it is a way that we have the capacity to go if we determine to go. The way may be thought of in three simple steps: One, we are lost and out of Christ. Two, we believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess our faith and are baptized into Christ where salvation is. Three, by remaining faithful to Christ in life, we have God's own word that heaven will be our home. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). If we abide in Christ, He will abide in us (John 15:6). And the living of life in the fellowship of the steps of Christ our example (First Peter 2:21) will lead us right to the gates of glory. There we shall be privileged to hear Christ's own words, "*Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" (Matthew 25:34). It is then that the toils of the road will seem nothing. We will have reached the end of the way. We will be home at last. What a comforting and wonderful thought to think of the home over there.

God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the angels of heaven, the redeemed of the ages, will be there waiting to greet us. And we shall be forever blessed in the presence of all that is holy and righteous in our home.

Heaven: Our Home

There is a story of two men who were returning to this country on board the same vessel. One was a very famous and prominent person, whose return had received a great deal of publicity. The other was an old man, with his beloved wife, who was coming back after many years of service as a preacher in a foreign land. As the boat neared the dock one could see the banners and hear the bands playing a song of welcome. But the fanfare was only for the famous individual, not for the preacher and his wife. Everyone was welcoming the famous one home. There was not even a person on the dock to meet the old preacher who had given his life in service to God and others. He felt a little hurt, not that there was not a great display, but that not anyone was there at all. His hurt was observed by his wife

and she asked what was bothering him. He told her, "I did hope that somebody would be here to welcome us home." And she, wisely and Scripturally remarked, "My dear husband, we are not yet home." She understood what this lesson is trying to convey. Heaven is our home. And we long for it when our journey on earth comes to a close.

† † † † †

God Is Not Mocked

"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." (Galatians 6:7,8).

There are some things people attempt to do that are absolutely futile and useless. Some things simply cannot be done and it is senseless to think that they can be done. One such thing is to be successful in an attempt to mock God. To succeed in that effort means certain disaster anyway. It is an impossibility. Yet, it is hard for many of us to learn this. Some of us have to learn things the hard way. Tragically, some of us may not learn this truth until it is too late to make any correction or do anything about our foolishness in the attempt to mock God.

Through the ages people have tried to mock God. To mock God means to ridicule Him, treat Him with scorn, deride Him and His will. It is the picture of one tossing his head and turning up his nose with disregard, contempt, sneers and defiance of God. Some might think that nobody would ever attempt nor dare do such a thing. But just look around you at the masses of people who care nothing for God, who detest His church, who ridicule His word, who violate His commands, who ignore anything and everything that He has revealed. It is not an overstatement to say that most of the world attempts to mock God. Our text teaches that God will not permit one to be successful in such a thing. Our limited study will focus attention on three ways that people have and do attempt to mock God. Let us be sure that we do not try it.

Mocking Authority

Men mock God by mocking His authority over them. How people do detest having it said that they have a duty to God! They prefer to “do their own thing and go their own way” without divine rebuke.

In Numbers 16 we read of a rebellion led by Korah. Some 250 others joined with him in this rebellion. Israel was wandering in the wilderness and Korah and company decided they had suffered enough under the God-appointed leadership of Moses and decided to rebel and take over. “*And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them. Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?*” (Numbers 16:3). This was a direct challenge to the authority of Moses.

But did they succeed? No, inasmuch as Moses was God’s leader. A challenge against Moses was tantamount to a challenge against the authority of God. God commanded that all the people separate themselves from Korah and company and He caused the earth to open and swallow all of them, thus ending the rebellion. Nobody can defy God’s authority and expect to succeed in it. Eventually his failure will come.

To mock authority is rebellion. First Samuel 15:23, “*Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft...*” Witchcraft was a sin punishable by death under the law of Moses. It was to claim magical powers. It was to claim the ability to work the supernatural when God had given no such power. It was deceitful trickery based upon superstition. Rebellion is classified alongside witchcraft as abominable before God.

It is to rebel against God’s authority to not only teach that which differs from His will but also to accept what is contrary to it. We have a responsibility regarding what we teach, what we endorse, what we accept, what we bid “*God speed.*” (Second John 9). We are warned against false teachers (Second Peter 2:1). We are warned against following men (Mark 7:7-9). When people follow creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, councils, conferences, schools, papers, where men have devised their own doctrines, we are guilty of rebelling against the authority of God. Christ is our authority (Matthew 28:18). To have any other, or place some other alongside Him, such as the Book of Mormon, is to mock God. Whether one sets himself or someone else as his authority, whether he follows some philosophy or theology of men, unless it is taught in God’s Word as God’s

Word he is guilty of mocking God by rebelling against God's duly identified and appointed authority.

Mocking Warnings

Men mock God by mocking His warnings. God does not make idle threats. As surely as God will keep His promises, just as surely can we be confident He will keep His warnings and threats. God's warnings are not attempted intimidations, but are manifestations of His love and grace toward us, designed to warn us and prevent us from living the role of a fool and going the way to an everlasting hell.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ignored His warning that in the day they ate of the forbidden tree they would die. They died spiritually, separated themselves from God, when they ignored His warning. Did they succeed in their attempted mockery by setting aside His warning? No, but rather by them sin entered the world, they were driven from the garden, and certain curses were placed against the, some of which hover over mankind to this day. God would not be mocked.

The people who lived before the flood of Noah were warned by the preaching of Noah, but they gave no heed. They failed in their attempt to ignore and sneer at the warning of God. What of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah? Were they not warned? Was not Lot and his family warned? They paid little to no attention, but were failures in their effort to set God's warnings aside as if they were nothing.

What of us today? People are warned of the coming judgment. *"For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10). *"And as it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment,"* but who pays attention to Hebrews 9:27?

We are warned of the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8). We are told that *"the way of the ungodly shall perish."* (Psalm 1:6). But still many run the pathway of wickedness. Peter said, *"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."* (Second Peter 3:7). But does this stop men from their sins? Only a few give much credence to God's warnings as if they matter. They think, act, as if such will never be. They laugh and joke about such things as sin, the judgment, the devil, hell, etc. But the Word of

God being true, mockery of this sort shall not be allowed to reign. *“For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation...”* (Hebrews 2:2,3). Of course, we shall not escape.

Mocking Commands

Men also attempt to mock God by mocking His commands. But this was the same mistake King Saul made when God told him to go and utterly destroy the wicked Amalekite nation. Saul could have obeyed but decided it was better to listen to his people, save Agag, the best animals, and he obviously allowed many people to escape because we read of the Amalakite nation again. Saul said he did what the people wanted. (Sounds like some preachers today.) In spite of his disobedience, he arrogantly contended he was obedient.

Did he succeed? No, his kingdom was taken from him and he lost the cherished fellowship with God, Samuel, and became the object of God’s righteous wrath. Samuel told him, *“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.”*

But many of us today persist in going our own way to please ourselves or some other rather than following the prescribed revelation of God. People will worship whatever way they want. They do whatever makes them feel good whether it is authorized or not. They practice what they deem to be popular and crowd-getting without due regard for Scripture.

Paul wrote, *“For do I now persuade men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ.”* (Galatians 1:10). Jesus said, *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* (John 14:15). When we do what we want and like but ignore God and what He has taught in the Bible, we are trying to mock God. Shall we be more successful than those who have failed before us?

We might cry loudly that we love God. But such is just insincere lip-service and hypocrisy if we do not have as our prime intent to obey His commands (Matthew 15:8). Even baptized people ignore so much that God has said, such as faithfulness for worship, the doing of good, forsaking the evils of this world. Shall we somehow be the first to overcome God and succeed in mocking Him? We think not and would advise us all that the effort is senseless and damning to the soul.

We Cannot Succeed

God is not mocked. It may seem so for the moment. But at best, any appearance of mockery of God is temporary. In a sense, nobody ever breaks God's law, but rather they break themselves against it. To mock God is like throwing glasses against a wall of solid granite and expecting the wall to collapse. Only the dish shall be shattered and the wall unmoved.

Why should anybody want to mock God, seeing the bountiful blessings He offers us when we honor Him? By obedience to the gospel, in faith, repentance, confession and baptism, we come to Him through Christ. If we serve Him faithfully throughout life, heaven will be our home. We have God's own Word for it. Why attempt to run against Him?

† † † † †

The Return Of Our Lord

The return of Christ is a much discussed subject, usually heavily sprinkled with speculations, false theories, confusion, and many misleading doctrines. Possibly some of this is attributable to the fact that there are many unknown factors surrounding it. But in this matter, as in all others, we do well to confine ourselves to what Deity has determined to reveal and leave the speculations, guess work, sensational theories, and doctrines of men to those who feel they have a need for such as that.

We want to ask four questions in this lesson pertaining to the Lord's return: One, does the Bible teach that He is coming again? Two, when is He to come? Three, what shall take place when He comes? Four, what shall we do to be ready for His coming?

Will He Come?

The Bible does teach that Jesus will come again. We wish now to follow a principle of Matthew 18:15,16, concerning dealing with an erring brother where we are admonished, "...*At the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be*

established.” This is a principle stemming from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 17:6. We shall call for some witnesses to testify concerning our questions and establish the truth by them.

Our first witness is First Thessalonians 4:16. “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.”

The second witness is Hebrews 9:27,28, “And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die and after this cometh judgment, so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation.”

Our third witness is Colossians 3:1-4. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above and not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

For good measure, let us call upon other witnesses. “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). Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also.” (John 14:1-3). Peter testified in Second Peter 3:1-14, that even though there be scoffers who question His coming, the “day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...”

He further revealed that time is of no essence or consequence to God in the fulfillment of His promises. But the end of all things will come and Christ will come to announce it.

Surely, seeing this vast array of testimony from the inspired Word of God, no honest mind that believes the Bible doubts that Christ will come again.

When?

When shall He come? We can know something about when He shall come. For instance, Christ said it would be as in the days of Noah, as people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Life will be proceeding as usual (Matthew 24:38). But we cannot know when that will be.

Mark 13:32-37, *“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning. Lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”*

Second Peter 3:10 tells us, *“But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night.”* This means it will be unannounced. There will be no sudden warning. There will not be signs and indications whereby we can know when His return is imminent.

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven but my Father only...Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh...Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come...Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh...” (Matthew 24:36,42,44; 25:13).

One prominent and irrefutable conclusion from these passages is that all this talk about the *“imminent coming of Christ.”* *“Christ is coming soon,”* *“the signs of the times,”* that are supposed to pre-announce His arrival, are just so much speculative false teaching. There is none who knows and there are none who can tell when it will be.

But let us be sure that our lack of knowledge of *“when”* in no way diminishes the certainty that He will return.

What Will Happen?

What is going to take place when the Lord returns? There will be many things, no doubt, that are not revealed to us in the Bible. The awesomeness of the event will overwhelm us all. But there are some things that we can know will occur at the coming of Christ.

It will be an occasion of glory for both Christ and the Christians. *"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."* (Colossians 3:4). John writes *"...we know that if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* (First John 3:2).

There will be the resurrection of both the good and evil. *"Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). The resurrection will be the last day. *"Martha said unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* (John 11:24). All this will take place when Jesus returns. *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (First Thessalonians 4:16,17). This last passage refers to the two classes of the redeemed that shall be with the Lord, those who had died before He came and those who were alive when He comes. The resurrection of both the good and the evil will be the same time.

First Corinthians 15 is the inspired argument for the reality of the resurrection, and in this chapter we learn some of the things that will transpire when the Lord comes. *"And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doeth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery, We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, 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 :49-58).

Paul wrote, *“For our conversation is in heaven from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”* (Philippians 3:20,21). While we do not profess to comprehend all that is involved in a spiritual and changed body, we know that this change shall become a reality when the Lord returns.

More Happenings

The return of Christ will mark the time of the judgment. *“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats...,”* and the chapter continues with a picture of the events of the judgment to come. Notice that the initiation of the judgment is when Christ returns.

Of course, with the judgment there shall begin the vengeance upon the wicked (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). And the reward shall be given to the redeemed.

The return of the Lord Jesus marks the end of the world. The world shall be destroyed. *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”* (Second Peter 3:10-12). For the righteous, there will be a new habitation, a new heaven and earth, a new place of residence. It will not be this old one made over and renewed, but a new dwelling place.

And what of the church, the kingdom of God? First Corinthians 15:24, *“Then cometh the end, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death.”* Death is destroyed by the resurrection of the dead, which occurs at the return of the

Lord, as we have already noted.

Are You Ready?

There is a great day coming. It is inevitable and we shall not escape it, nor the events of it. We shall each one be present to see these things. Therefore it behooves us to be ready for that day to come. What shall we do to be ready? Those who have never obeyed the gospel must do so if they be saved. Those who are not faithful in Christ must be faithful if they expect to go to heaven for eternity. There is no other way to be ready, but when one is right with God, being faithful in Christ, he is ready for the return of Christ. Are you ready for that day to come?

† † † † †

Parable Of The Sower

“The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow, and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them. Some fell upon stony places where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth, and when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But other fell into good ground and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”
(Matthew 13:1-8).

This was probably the first of the seven parables of Jesus that are recorded in this chapter. A parable is often defined as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is the presentation of a spiritual truth by illustration from the natural and physical world. It could be a record of an actual event, or a fictitious one that could happen.

Jesus taught in parables for several reasons. It was an effective way of teaching, leading people from the known to the unknown. In this way Jesus could draw upon the knowledge

and understanding that people already had, taking them into knowledge and understanding of the spiritual message He was delivering. It attracted attention to His message. It was a way of veiling the truth from those who did not want it while unveiling truth to those who sought it. It served as the key to the door of understanding, opening that door for truth seekers, locking that door to those who would commit the truth to scorn. One would be unable to find fault with the natural circumstances presented and therefore would be unable to find fault with the spiritual truth that it represented.

The Earthly Sory

In this parable Jesus calls upon His hearers to picture a farmer sowing seed as it falls into various kinds of places. Some fell by the wayside, a hard pathway. The result was that birds came and picked it up and took it away. Some fell into shallow, stony ground with only a thin layer of soil. It sprang up but could find no nourishment and could take no root. Under the heat of the sun it withered and died. Some fell among thorns, like into a fence row and amidst weeds. It sprang up, only to be choked to death by the weeds and died failing to bear fruit. But some fell into various kinds of good soil, that was cultivated and made ready for the seed, having fertility. The seed penetrated the soil, brought forth its plant and bore fruit in varying amounts, depending upon the quality of the soil.

The simplicity of the story is matched by the profoundness of the spiritual truths taught by it. The explanation and application of the parable begins with Matthew 13:18, also Luke 8:11.

Luke 8:11 identifies the seed as the Word of God. The soils are varying hearts into which the seed of the kingdom is sown. The sowing of the seed is the teaching of the word, and the hearing of the word is like the seed falling into the soil. Anyone who teaches the word would be a sower, and anyone who heard it would be one of the places into which the seed fell. The parable illustrates the varying reactions people have to the message of salvation. As we read and study, we have the opportunity to search our own heart and see how we react to the truth of Christ.

“When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.” (Matthew 13:19).

Wayside

Some that hear the gospel have hearts and consciences so seared and hardened that the gospel cannot penetrate. Their minds are closed, their hearts are prejudiced, and they will not see and understand. The truth never makes any real impression upon them. It is never given the opportunity to germinate and grow.

But the seed does not remain there. Satan finds a way to take it away, side tracking one's thinking away from the truth, bringing other interests into one's life, anything and everything to prevent the word from touching the heart favorably. And herein is a tragedy. The gospel, God's power to salvation, is taken away. The opportunity for heaven is ignored and removed. The rejection of the word means no hope for salvation.

Stony Ground

"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word and anon with joy receiveth it. Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while, for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." (Matthew 13:21,22).

Happy is that person who hears the truth and gladly receives it. His sins are forgiven and he is heaven-bound. There is cause to rejoice. But he has not taken proper account of the costs, hardships, hazards, sacrifices that are necessary to being a Christian after becoming one. Lacking in depth of earnestness, determination, resolution, devotion, he takes no root by which to gain the needed strength and be stabilized. It is not long before that which was saved is destroyed. This is a forceful refutation of the false doctrine that one cannot be lost after being saved.

Being rooted in truth is as essential as coming to it. Paul prayed *"that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love."* (Ephesians 3:17). *"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard..."* (Colossians 1:23). *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."* (Colossians 2:6,7).

Christian living is a process of growth. *"But grow in the grace*

and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Colossians 2:6,7).

Christian living is a process of growth. "*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...*" (Second Peter 3:18). Christian living is a matter of adding certain Christlike qualities to our own lives and character (Second Peter 1:5,7). It is often the fault of baptized people to fail to grow (Hebrews 5:12-14). Sometimes when one begins to realize that it takes work, self-denial, sacrifice, restraint, and often includes suffering persecution, he finds it easier to slide back into the ways of sin. The heat of the tribulations come, and because of the lack of growth and failure to be rooted, the person withers as does the plant under the sun. The only prevention for such a fate is to get the proper spiritual nourishment through study, prayer, worship, service, and godly living. There is no short-cut to becoming strong in the Lord.

Among Thorns

"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22).

We have the same seed, the same sower, the word is received, but it is choked out by weeds and thorns. The nourishment and energy that is needful for growth is channeled elsewhere. The person becomes overly concerned and anxious about this life, materialism invades his heart. Luke says the thorns are worldly care, riches, and the pleasures of this life.

All such things are not necessarily evil of themselves. Some are, but some worldly attention is necessary in the conduct of life. Such things must be kept in their place and not be allowed to become primary.

Paul was sorrowful over the defection of Demas from the cause of Christ because he loved this present world. (Second Timothy 4:10). "*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which shile some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*" (First Timothy 6:9,10).

John wrote, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is*

not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lusts thereof. But he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” (First John 2:15-17).

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses. Know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoso therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4).

For one to fall in love with the world, he must fall out of love with God. One chokes out the other. How foolish for a general to give his all to win a battle at the cost of losing the war. How foolish to exchange that which is temporary at the loss of that which is eternal. How foolish to gain the whole world, but lose the soul. We can allow even our jobs, homes, health, wealth, education, social affairs, sports, clubs, pleasures, etc., all things of the present life to crowd out time, energy, thought, devotion for the things of God and the welfare of our spirits.

Good Ground

“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Luke says the good ground is that person with an honest and good heart (Luke 8:16). His heart is open to conviction. He wants to know the truth. He loves truth. He longs for salvation. He hears the Word and understands its application. He believes it and obeys it. He lives in such a manner as to bring forth good fruit as a Christian according to his ability and as he has opportunity.

God does not expect everyone to produce exactly alike. Each one differs from the other. We all have our individual traits and talents. What God does expect is that we do what we are able to do. This kind of person is the kind that builds churches, saves souls, puts the Lord first in life, rears his family God’s way, brings glory to the Father because of the good life that he lives.

This parable should provoke within each of us serious self-examination to determine the quality of heart that we have. What is our reaction to truth? Are we producing the fruit of the Spirit that the Christian is expected to produce?

† † † † †

Things In Hades That Ought To Be In The Church

Our Scripture text is Luke 16:19-31. Please read the text. Verse 23 informs us that the rich man lifted up his eyes being in a place called “hell” in the King James Version. There are two Greek words that are translated by the one English word “hell” in that majestic version of the Bible. One word is “gehenna,” the place of eternal punishment. The other is “hades,” the disembodied and unseen state of the dead. This is not a translation mistake, because the word hell has both meanings, as is noted in most modern dictionaries. But we need to realize that there are two different words involved. This distinction is noted in the American Standard Version of the Bible.

As for “hades,” the word itself does not denote whether one is in a state of torment or blessedness. There are two parts of “hades.” The rich man was in “hades” and in torment. Jesus went to “hades” which He also called paradise. (Acts 2:27; Luke 23:43). The part of “hades” that we are considering is the place of torment.

There be those who say this is only a parabolic account. They do this hoping somehow this will prop up their contention that there is no real punishment for anyone after physical death. To deny that there is punishment is to deny that Jesus taught the truth, whether a parable or not. It is also to deny Matthew 25:46, which teaches an everlasting punishment, as do many other passages. Proper names are not usually found in parables whereas this contains the name of Abraham. As for the truth taught, it matters not.

A Child Can Be Lost

Before we approach the major theme of this study, let us consider four other important truths taught here. One, it shows that a child of God can be lost. Both the rich man and Lazarus were children of God by virtue of the fact that they were of the chosen nation, Israel. The rich man called Abraham “*father*” and Abraham called him “*son*.” The message that the rich man wanted his brothers to hear was the message of Moses, God’s law for Israel. Under that law, one was a child of God by virtue

of his fleshly descendancy from Abraham.

John the Baptist warned against relying on that ancestry as if it was sufficient. He taught that the time was soon to come when ancestry would not make one a child of God, but one's personal obedience to Christ. Obviously, the rich man, a child of God, had fallen and was lost. This contradicts the doctrine that once one is a child of God he cannot be lost. He is one that definitely was lost.

Circumstances Different

We also learn that circumstances in this life may be quite different from those in the life to come. Lazarus knew few friends and had even fewer comforts. The rich man had everything this world could afford. He was considered successful and Lazarus a failure. We learn that real success is not to be measured by what one has in this life. In the life after this one, Lazarus was the blessed one and the rich man was in torment. Lazarus achieved genuine and lasting success that was eternal.

Consciousness

There is also the teaching of consciousness after death. The rich man lifted up his eyes and could see. He was able to suffer. He was aware of his torment. He could cry and beg. He was able to recall or remember his life on earth and suffer regret. He could recall his brothers. He was not aware of all that was taking place on earth at that moment but he could remember the time he was on earth. Solomon wrote, *"For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten, also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished, neither have they any more portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun."* (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6). The key to understanding that passage is *"under the sun."* They have no more to do with this life. They would soon be forgotten, even though they could remember their life. What was taking place on earth is beyond the knowledge of the dead.

Matthew 7:22 also shows there is consciousness after death and the ability to recall events of this life. *"Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, have we not prophecied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?"*

Destiny Set

We also learn that our eternal destiny is decided in this life. Now is the time of opportunity to be saved. There is no second chance. There is a “*great gulf fixed*” and there is no crossing over from one place to the other. All the preparation for the next life must be made in this one.

But now let us turn our attention to things that are revealed to exist in the hadean world that ought to exist in the church now. We are not considering things that are sometimes in the church that will wind up in torment, but things that ought to be in the church.

Authority

There ought to be the recognition of the power and authority of the Word of God. Whereas the rich man thought he could disobey and all still be well with him, in hades he learned better. God’s Word was for him and for others to respect. At the time of the life of the rich man, Moses’ law was God’s authority (verse 29). Today we look to the teaching of Christ for it is through Him that God now speaks (Hebrews 1:1,2). The gospel is the power to save (Romans 1:16). To disobey the gospel is to be lost (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). There must be this recognition of God’s Word.

Prayer

Next, there ought to be fervent prayer and petition. The petition of the rich man was earnest, sincere, heartfelt. All he wanted was just a drop of water for some relief. He then requested earnestly some special assistance for his brothers.

Prayer is a God-given privilege, the avenue of communication between man and God that God has ordained. God promises to hear and answer the prayers of His own. The power of Christianity in the world would be enhanced if there was more fervent prayer by those in the church.

Concern

There was also real concern for the lost in hades. The rich man did not want his brothers to come to where he was. He sought their salvation. He wanted Lazarus to go back and warn

them. Just here he was thinking of others and not just himself. Is not this an attitude that ought to abide in the heart of every Christian?

The rich man should have thought more of his brothers and himself while he was living on earth. At least he was thinking of them now.

The mission of the church is to carry the saving gospel to the world, to be the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 1:15). No church fulfills its reason for existence that only concentrates on itself to the neglect of the lost. The church must be mission minded. The first word of the great commission is "Go." *"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things."* (Romans 10:14,15).

Right And Wrong

In hades, there was distinct and recognizable distinction between righteousness and wickedness. This distinction ought exist among those who make up the church. When it is not so, the church has a responsibility to exercise discipline to keep the church pure. As a rule, the twentieth century church has been lax in this matter. The result is that sinfulness is tolerated in the church to its disgrace and discredit before the world. The church is in the world but the world does not belong in the church. Too often those of the world cannot detect any real and significant difference in the lives of those of the church and those who care nothing for it. They see the same actions, motives, words, ambitions, dress, conduct, etc. And they so often fail to see the devotion and priority to Christ that a Christian is supposed to manifest if he is faithful to Christ.

There was a clear-cut distinction in hades, wasn't there? And there ought to be just as clear-cut distinction in the church.

Urgency

The church must stress the urgency of seizing its opportunities to be saved in this life while there is time. The rich man, concerned for his brothers, knew that something needed to be done and right away. He wanted something special, in

addition to the Word of God. This is the fault with many today. They are not satisfied with the provision God has made and seek and want something special, some direct operation of the Spirit, some miracle, some feeling, some experience, something better felt than told. The brothers would not receive anything more than what God provided. Neither shall people today have anything more than His Word.

Those of us in the church must press the urgency of salvation upon others. They, like ourselves, do not have unlimited time and opportunity to get right with God. Life is uncertain, death is sure, the judgment awaits, and there is no escape from eternity. The rich man knew it too late. Can we learn it now while there is time?

We would insist that if these qualities that are observable in hades in this teaching of Jesus was in the church in as notable fashion and demonstration, many more would go to heaven than otherwise will be there. It is your task and mine to make it so.

† † † † †

MUD IN THE EYE OF THE EVOLUTIONIST

Did you ever get your wheel of your car stuck in the mud? After finally getting out and you began to ride along, mud would sling from your wheel. Did you ever think that this was another evidence that the theory of evolution, and one of the explanations offered for the origin of things, cannot possibly be true? They contend all things exist as a result of the natural events. But the mud from the wheel and one of their explanations contradict each other.

Notice the mud as it flies from the wheel. It seems to be going in every direction. But the fact is that the mud flies from the wheel according to the direction of the rotating wheel from which the mud comes.

Look at the God-deniers explanation of the origin of the universe. They contend that the earth and all the other planets were once part of a rapidly rotating substance. Of course, they do not tell us what this substance was nor what really happened to it. They do not even tell us where that substance came from so they really are not explaining origins at all. But someday,

somehow, at some time, somewhere, the earth, and the other planets were thrown off. Do you suppose that mystical substance just blew to pieces and nothing remains of it? I do not know, but we can “blow to pieces” this imaginative theory that by which some seek to replace God as Creator.

Science proves that objects thrown from rapidly rotating bodies will rotate in the direction they are thrown. (Mud from the wheel). But there are variations in the rotations and orbits of the planets and satellites that are supposed to have come from this mysterious and unidentified “father” substance.

C. H. Woodruff, in **BIBLICAL ANALYSIS**, reminds us that Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Uranus rotate from west to east. The eighth satellite of Jupiter, the tenth of Saturn, Neptune and its one satellite, four satellites of Uranus, rotate from east to west. If they all got their start from being “thrown off” there is a contradiction. It is the theory that ought be “thrown off.”

We should not be too surprised that such theories come and go, often being discredited by the very people who formulated them. But men will not be content to accept what has always harmonized with scientific discovery; namely, the creation account in the first book of the Bible.

While some claim they continue their investigations in the interest of knowledge and science, seeking explanations for what they do not yet know, it is tragic that when the evidence runs against their theories, they begin looking for something else rather than accept what is consistent with their findings. It is well known in our day of expanding scientific information that much that is done in the name of research and science is anything but research and science. It is a blatant and persistent attempt to find something, somewhere, some time, from some source, that they think they can use to discredit the Bible. Sinful men will never be content until they try and try again to remove their obligation to God. To accomplish this they must remove the Bible and they must destroy the Biblical teaching concerning God. How desperately they seek that destruction!

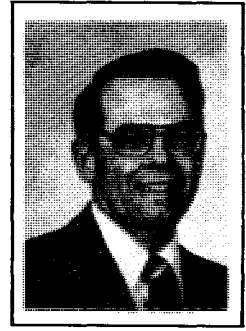
But the Word of God has not been moved nor shall it be. It stands and shall forever endure. Those who respect it, study it, learn it, follow it, live by it, render obedience to it, shall stand also.

JWB



When To Dust Your Feet

The Bible student knows that our Lord told His apostles that there might be certain times when they should just shake the dust off their feet against a city and its people. He meant there are times when it does not good to continue to deal with some folks. Nothing worthwhile can be accomplished by continued association . You just have to let them go their own way and refuse to be bothered with them anymore. Just when it is proper to do this is not always easily determined however. Many people, even probably most, communication with such a person who reflects dishonesty, impugns people. But there can come such a time and that is evident.



JAMES W. BOYD

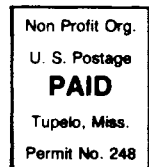
Do you suppose one is justified in refusing further association and communication with a person who persistly reflects dishonesty, impugns motives, misrepresents others, becomes a talebearer and sower of discord? After trying to deal with them and present truth to them, what benefit is there to cast the truth before them that they simply trod underfoot? We have known but few people like that in life, but we have known some and know some now.

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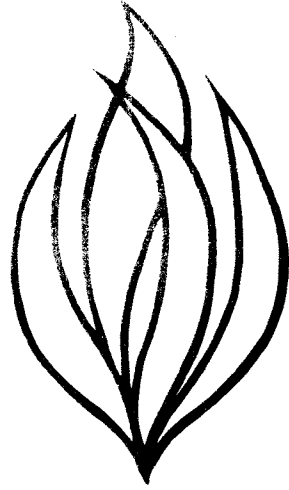
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A Burning Fire



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



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What It Means to Grow up

We begin with two scriptures as our test: *“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man I put away childish things.”* (First Corinthians 10:13). *“He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:10-15).

Both passages have to do with the matter of “growing up.” We are to grow up physically and spiritually. Life is a process of growth from one level to another. And none can deny that the years of the young, and often of the older, that are the “growing up years,” can be very difficult years. As one young person put it, “One minute it seemed like everybody took for granted that I knew what to do when I really did not; and the next minute everybody was telling me what to do as if I knew nothing.”

Growth Involves Everyone

The more adult years have their problems of growth also. Sometime people think that the younger years were easier. The young years have their difficulties to the young just as the older years have their difficulties to the older. Because we are all in the process of “growing up” it seems appropriate to understand just what this means.

In the physical world, we expect growth. It seems that the passing of the calendar takes care of that, if all is normal and well. Just a few months, a few years, then one matures physically. What many do not seem to understand is that the outward, visible, physical growth is not the whole story. In fact, it is not even the most important part of growth. The big part is

the inner growth, the spiritual growth, the maturing of the mind, judgment, thinking and self-control. This has always proven to be more difficult.

It is unfortunate that many young people place a ceiling on their lives while they are young. Instead of building foundations, they are erecting ceilings through which they shall never penetrate. They fritter away their time and opportunities for growth. I suppose we all have done this to some extent, and we live to regret it. Youth has time, ability, opportunity to lay the groundwork for a fine and useful life. But the failure to seize these swiftly passing qualities will restrict one's usefulness and happiness in life. Once the young years are spent and the record made, it cannot be changed. One of man's strongest desires is to be able to start all over and do differently. The very best we can do is to start from where we are. The past cannot be undone. What a tragedy that some build their ceilings through neglect of education, failure to take care of the body, wasting the development of the mind, forming attitudes and habits that harm his character and potential. While the young often resent being told, it is still true, that youth is the time for gathering information, building habits and attitudes, properly laying good foundations upon which to build life.

Measuring Maturity

We measure maturity in various ways. Birthdays are chronological measures, but not always a very accurate measure of maturity. Some live decades and never grow up in the things that matter.

Physical size is sometimes used to measure, but that is also a very fallible standard by which to measure real maturity. Boys of fifteen are often larger than many two and three times their age, but nobody would contend that a fifteen year old has reached maturity. Years ago my grandmother would have considered a boy to be a man once he began to wear long pants. But that is a fallacious idea. Girls thought that once they wore high heels they were grown. It seems laughable, doesn't it? People may look grown and be far from it.

Isn't it pitiable that somehow we have "educated" our society to think that the use of profanity, cigarettes, disrespect of authority, wild driving, strange dress, late hours, are marks of maturity? So much that is mistakenly called "adult" today is more "adultery" than adulthood.

What are the real elements that determine whether one is grown up? One, the way a person spends his time. Here is a real clue. Some have a distorted idea of bigness. Those who waste their time in constant play, watching television, have hardly begun to grow. Having access to a car, seeing all the movies, being an athletic hero are life's goals for the immature. "When I get like that, I have arrived," is their idea.

But as one really grows up, he sees things in a better and different light, the light of experience and reality. He realizes just how foolish and childish such things are. These are not evidences of being grown. They are evidences that there is much growing to be done.

We are taught to redeem the time, take advantage of it and use it wisely and constructively. Life is composed of time and we ought make every minute count. Those who realize that show signs of maturity. While we do not expect the young to fully grasp this, the fact that they do not is evidence of their immaturity. But it is something you should expect from those who claim to be mature.

Values And Maturity

What do you consider to be the real values of life? This helps to determine your level of maturity. Many go through life and never learn what matters. When we want to know the value of things we often turn to a catalog and check the prices. God's book is a catalog of what is valuable in life and we need to be better acquainted with it. If you want to know whether something is worthwhile or not, see what the Lord thinks about it. How does it fit into His standard of things?

What a person thinks of others and how he treats them is a mark of maturity or the lack of it. How does he consider the authorities over him, parental, civil, religious, educational, occupational. The immature person resents authority over him. He feels depressed and that somehow others are taking advantage of him. He refuses to abide by the law; reneges on his agreements; is irresponsible in his work; cannot be depended upon; even rebels against the authority of God. No person is mature until he realizes that he is accountable to God for all of his life and everything pertaining to it. That individual who has the idea that the world orbits around him and for him and to satisfy him is sorely off beat. He will have little to no regard for others and consider everybody out of step but himself. He

simply has not grown up. His reactions to whatever gets in his way reflects his maturity. The immature will pout, cry, kick, scoff, lash out. The mature person realizes that such is a part of life, take it in stride, and keep on his own path without hesitation or distraction.

Making Choices

One of the biggest factors in growing up is the ability to make decisions. We all have to make so many of them. True enough, many of the decisions we make are relatively insignificant. But some are life forming and are determinators of our eternity.

Some never learn to make decisions. They were never allowed to make them when they were growing up. They were never taught standards by which to make an intelligent decision. Therefore, when they reach a point in life that they are called upon to make decisions, they know not which way to turn. Learning how to make decisions is such an important part of maturation.

Someone has said, "In each boy or girl there are a number of different selves. There is an honest self and a dishonest self. There is a truthful self and an untruthful self. There is a kind and generous self and an unkind self. There is a selfish self and an unselfish self. There is an obedient self and a disobedient self." In this matter of growing up, each one must determine which of these selves will be the real you. As one decides to be honest, truthful, kind, selfless, and obedient, he is making great strides toward real maturity.

The Inspired Window

Think for a moment about Moses. The Bible is a magnificent window through which we can see this man as he grows up. "*By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.*" (Hebrew 11:24-26). The American Standard Version translates "come to years" with the words "grown up." When Moses was "grown up," when he was truly mature, he decided against the ways of sin and decided to be God's person. He might have had everything else that this world

could offer, but he was wise enough, mature enough, to make the right decision. He chose God's way.

All of the big decisions are not made in the capitals of the world's nations. Bigger events are taking place in the lives of people everyday, everywhere. While some may consider the conquests of Caesar to be the outstanding events of the first century, that which was far more important was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the faith of Christ. Even today, as the leaders of the world ponder the gigantic ills and tensions, there may well be a decision made in the mind of some boy or girl that will have a greater effect in years to come on the world, or even have a bearing on things eternal. The decision to be a Christian is the most significant decision that a human being can make.

In God's Image

Every young person ought to believe in himself or herself. Each must remember that he or she is created in God's image and each counts before God. There are things of eternal value that can be accomplished when one goes God's way. Anyone choosing a goal and purpose in life that fits God's purposes has the assurance that God will be with him.

The greatest need of our world is for truly devout Christian men and women. Our needs are not for faster aircraft, or rockets to take men to the moon. We need lives that will take people to heaven. Our need is not more missiles, but morals. We need not have creeds, but Christ. Physical food, as essential to life as it is, is not as needful as the spiritual milk that nourishes the soul. We need Christians to counterbalance the increasing wickedness and degeneracy of the world. We need those who will use what God has given them, prepare themselves, and be exhausted in His service of doing good. To have that takes mature people.

The Day Of Maturity

Every life has what we call "red-letter days," that is, days that mark the more important events, such as the day of our birth, our marriage, our first job, etc. The greatest day in anyone's life is the day that they declare, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," and then render obedience in baptism into Christ. All other days take a second place to that one. On that day, you begin to do the things for which you were created; namely, to

bring glory to God by your life. That is a mark of real growth. And the rest of life continues to be a process of growth until that notable day of death when we pass from this world to the next. Unless we reach sufficient maturity to be ready for that day, our lives, our existence, will have been for nought. Our regret will be eternal. Our immaturity will have overtaken us to our destruction.

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The Bible Heart

We hear so much about “heartfelt religion.” Preachers ask their hearers to give their hearts to Jesus or to let God live in the heart. There is much talk about the “heart.” But do we understand what the Bible teaches with respect to the heart of man? There is much misunderstanding in the world concerning it that forms the basis for much false teaching, false hopes, false expectations, false security, resulting from dependence on emotional feelings as evidence of salvation. It also causes people to close the heart to the truth. You can hear people say, “I know that I am saved because I feel it right here in my heart,” and pound their chest. Others have been heard to say, “I can tell you the very moment that Christ came into my heart” and begin recounting some “experience”, again pounding their chest which contains the blood pump of the body.

Two Hearts

There is a physical heart and there is a spiritual heart. The physical pumps the blood through the arteries and veins of the body. It is the center of the circulatory system and operates involuntarily. The operation of the physical heart is often affected by emotions. We speak of the heart “skipping a beat” at certain stressful times. Emotions affect so much of the operation of the body, including the digestive system, respiratory system, nervous system and the circulatory system. Because this is true, some religious exercises are designed to arouse the emotions, stir up people, get them excited, produce a physical reaction due to emotions, make people feel good, produce some kind of emotional response, and call it the operation of the Holy Spirit

on the “heart.” Often it is called “getting religion” or “enjoying the Spirit.”

While emotions affect the body, emotions are simply the result of what we believe to be true. If we believe something good, we will feel good. If we are convinced of something bad, it makes us feel badly. How we feel does not prove what we believe is true or false. Therefore, emotional reactions are not reliable as a source of evidence of salvation or the operation of the Holy Spirit, or much of anything else. Such reactions are never cited in the Bible as a means to know when we are saved. Emotions can be the same when the truth is told or when a lie is told but believed to be the truth. We may well be emotional when we are saved, but we do not know we are saved just because we have become emotional. Our feelings only reflect what we think is true, not necessarily what is true.

Unreliable

Let us consider some examples where the unreliability of emotions and feelings is evident. Do you remember the time when the brothers of Joseph sold him into slavery and told their father, Jacob, that they found Joseph’s coat stained with blood? They led Jacob to believe that Joseph was dead. He could not have felt worse about it even if it had been true. He would not be comforted. But Joseph was not dead. Jacob’s emotional reaction was due to what he believed to be true, but what he believed was not actually true.

Paul, formerly known as Saul, was a persecutor of the cause of Christ before he was converted. But he did what he did in all good conscience, thinking he was serving the Lord by suppressing what he believed as “heresy.” (Acts 26:9). He admitted that he had been a blasphemer and persecutor, even consenting to the death of Stephen, but all the while he felt confident he was doing right. But we know he was wrong. His feelings were not reliable to determine what was true or false.

Have you heard of pagan mothers who have actually thrown their children into the river for food for crocodiles, thinking these creatures were gods and they were worshipping them? They felt they were doing right. How horrible was their activity! Just consider your own experiences. You hear bad news and feel badly. Then it turns out not to be as you first thought. Were your feelings reliable to tell you what was right and wrong, true and false? Or did your feelings simply reflect what you thought

was accurate?

We can best understand the Biblical teaching on the heart by studying what the Scripture reveals that the heart does.

Intellect

The Bible heart is capable of intellectual activity. By the heart a person thinks. "*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" (Proverbs 23:7). Before the flood of Noah, Genesis 6:5 reads, "*...the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*" Jesus said to the scribes in Matthew 9:4, "*Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts.*"

By the heart a person reasons. Luke 3:15, "*...all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John.*" Mark 2:6, "*But there were certain of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts.*"

It is with the heart that man understands. "*For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*" (Matthew 13:15). Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 32:4, "*The heart of the rash shall understand knowledge.*"

When we consider the heart of man as the Bible speaks of it, we are talking about that part of man that thinks, reasons, understands.

The heart of man is also that which possesses the power of determination, volition, the power of making decisions and choices. The heart contains the motivating activity, turning a person in a certain direction, toward various activities and conduct. We call it the will of man.

It is with the heart that man purposes. Barnabas went to Antioch to preach and we read in Acts 11:23, "*He exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*" Second Corinthians 9:7, "*Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.*" The Bible heart is the will of man and has the power to determine his actions, motivating his conduct. Daniel 1:8 reads, "*But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself...*"

For a person to serve God, his heart must be converted so that his heart will make the right decisions and lead him in the right directions.

Emotions

The heart of man is also the seat of his emotions. Being the seat or center of the emotions is not the same as a physical reaction to the emotions or some emotional experience. This becomes clearer as we observe the emotions of the heart in contrast to the reactions of the physical heart to emotions.

The heart fears. Jeremiah 32:40, Jehovah said, *"I will put fear in their hearts."* Fear is in the heart. It manifests itself with various reactions. Fear is the emotion. The heart is the center or seat of fear.

The heart despises. Second Samuel 6:16, *"And as the ark of God came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart."*

It is with the heart that man loves. First Timothy 1:5, *"But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart."* Matthew 22:37, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart..."*

The heart sorrows. Nehemiah 2:2, *"Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart."* When one has suffered a great sorrow or loss, we speak of them as being heartbroken. The opposite of a broken heart is a heart of gladness where there is joy.

The heart desires. Romans 10:1, *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."* The heart can desire what is good and also what is evil. All these things are emotions. These emotions will manifest themselves in conduct and responses.

The Bible talks about purifying the heart, the heart being discouraged, being merry, wise, spiteful, deceitful, heavy, proud, froward and righteous. We now can see that the heart of man as presented in the Bible refers to the inward man, his spirit, that part of man that does not die when the body dies, that which is in the image of God. It is the heart of man that must be redeemed. *"Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"* (Psalm 51:10). *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."*

The Heart Believes

It is with the heart that man believes. *"With the heart man*

believeth unto righteousness.” We must have faith to be saved. Faith must be in the heart. This means the intellect of man is affected. He must have proper knowledge and understanding, making the proper decisions on the basis of evidence, and exercising the will to follow the Lord, having love and desire for the truth, hating and despising the evil. Mark 11:23 shows the heart can disbelieve and doubt. *“For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith.”* We cannot be saved with an unbelieving heart.

This faith that must be in one’s heart comes by the Word of God. *“So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17). The gospel is God’s power to save (Romans 1:16). By the word our hearts are purified (First Peter 1:22). Acts 15:9 teaches, *“And put no difference between us, purifying their hearts by faith.”* Their faith was in that message which had been preached to them (Acts 11:14). The gospel appeals to the heart by informing the intellect, provoking the right decisions, planting, arousing the righteous motives that lead to obedience to the gospel. We obey from the heart. *“Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness.”* (Romans 6:16-18).

Truly “Heartfelt”

When one has heard the gospel, believed it, decided to obey it and live according to it, then he has what can rightly be called “heartfelt religion” as far as the Bible is concerned. Knowledge of having done God’s will may well produce observable reactions of an emotional nature. There was rejoicing at the conversion of the Ethiopian and also the jailor (Acts 8:38; 16:34). To realize that you were lost and bound for hell, and then become aware of God’s love and provision of your salvation, taking advantage of your new spiritual state and relationship with God will cause one to have an emotional

reaction. It is an emotional experience. But the emotions come as a result of what you know to be true. It is not a case that you think something is true because of some emotional experience.

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The Right Way To Cover Sins

Romans 4:7,8, "*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sins.*"

Sometimes the simplest lessons prove to be among the most important. Such is the case with this lesson. It is applicable to everyone inasmuch as "*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23).

Generally speaking, while admitting some exceptions, people do not want what they have done that they consider wrong to be exposed. People do not like having their errors brought to the light of the truth. This is a common characteristic of mankind that Jesus recognized when He said, "*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*" (John 3:19-21). While there are some who do not care whether they do right or wrong, most people would prefer covering up what they have done that is wrong. They have some sense of responsibility about it and do not want the disapproval of others, even if they are not concerned about God's judgment.

Two Ways

We might say there are two ways that people try to cover their sins: (1) the wrong way, and (2) the right way. Our text speaks of those who have sinned but are blessed because their sins are covered. Obviously they are those whose sins have been covered the right way. Solomon wrote, "*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.*" Proverbs 28:13. Such a one has

obviously tried to cover his sins the wrong way and could not succeed. God no longer counts sins when covered the right way, but sins still mar the soul when we attempt to cover them the wrong way. We want to consider both ways so that we may avoid the one and follow the other.

Adam, Eve, Aaron, Saul

From the study of Adam and Eve we see people do not want God's disapproval. As a child wants to hide his wrongdoing from his parents, people seek to hide their sins from God. Genesis 3:8-10, *"And they heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."* Adam knew he had violated God's will and he wanted to escape God's disapproval. He tried to hide.

But the first sinners were not able to conceal their sin from God. Nor can we. If only we all would be persuaded of this reality! Jesus said, *"For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known."* Luke 12:2. *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."* Hebrews 4:13. When we know the law of God, we know we can violate it. *"I had not known sin except through the law, for I had not known coveting except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."* Romans 7:7. We can sin ignorantly, and we are still accountable for our sin. But knowing God's law we can know when we sin and know that we cannot hide our sins from the eyes of God. As surely as the voice of the Lord caused Adam to come out from his hiding and face his sin, so the voice of God, through the written Word, causes us to recognize the folly of hiding from God, leading us to face the reality of our need to cover our sins the right way.

Is It Knowledge

It is probably true that the majority of people who want their sins covered try to cover them the wrong way. Maybe they just do not know the right way. Possibly they are looking for an easier and less humiliating , face-saving way. Others may prefer

to cover sins their own way. Whatever way people choose, Solomon says they shall not prosper in it.

Another way that Adam tried to cover sins was to shift the blame to Eve. Then Eve tried to shift the blame to the devil. Aaron tried to blame the people for the golden calf at Sinai. Saul blamed the people for saving the best of the flocks and herds of the Amalekites. Down through the pages of history people have attempted to escape the responsibility for what they have done by pointing the finger at someone else. While others may tempt us, provoke us, even encourage us to sin, we still are the ones who sin and we still are the ones who must face them and cover them. We must find the right way.

Cain, Achan, Ananias, Saphirra

Cain tried to pretend innocence. When God asked him about Abel, he answered, in essence, "I don't know what you have in mind." But it did not work. Anything that might be more reprehensible than our sin is our pretended innocence when we know all along that we are guilty. God sees through that pretense.

Achan tried to hide the stolen goods he took from the spoils of Jericho in his tent. Those spoils belonged to the treasury of the Lord. But he was later discovered, and he and all of his were destroyed. He tried to cover his sins the wrong way.

Ananias and Saphirra lied about their gifts in order to cover their greed. Peter said they lied to the Holy Spirit. They did not escape the punishment that befell them immediately.

Over and over the Bible tells of those who have tried to cover sins by committing additional sins. The classic example of this is David, who tried to hide his guilt of adultery with Bathsheba through a whole series of additional sins, including deception, conspiracy, even to murder. But Nathan finally confronted him and told him, "*Thou art the man,*" who was guilty of transgressions.

Does Time Cover?

One of the more subtle ways that people try to cover sins is by the passing of time. "What I did was so long ago. Surely God has forgotten it by now." But time will not cover sins. Sins remain against us until they are covered properly. Even if what one has done was a long time ago, if it was not rightly covered,

it stand yet today. “But I do not do that anymore.” That is fine. But just ceasing from sin is not the right way to cover sins already committed, even though the cessation of sin is a part of repentance.

“But I am a religious people and even belong to a church.” Being religious is usually commendable. But that alone does not cover sins. Many are religious, even members of churches. Just belonging to a church is not so great inasmuch as there are so many churches in the world, but God has only one. Many churched people have never done what the Bible teaches must be done to cover sins. They have followed false doctrines and entertain false hopes. They have accepted such things as “salvation by faith alone,” or that one can “pray through” to God and be forgiven. Some claim they have experience the direct operation of the Holy Spirit and they feel good and think they are saved. They are honest and sincere in what they believe, but what they believe is not God’s way of covering sins. Neither is the “deathbed conversion” system the way to separate oneself from sins.

We repeat, unless sins are covered the right way, as Moses said long ago to his brethren, “*Be sure your sin will find you out.*” Numbers 32:23. We shall be confronted with the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Only By Forgiveness

No sin is covered until it is forgiven. “*Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin.*” Psalm 85:2. When you talk of forgiveness of sins you must include Christ. His blood was shed “*for the forgiveness of sins.*” Matthew 26:28. He came to seek and save the lost; to save sinners (Luke 19:10; First Timothy 1:15). He is the only way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Only by His blood can sins be forgiven. “*Without the shedding of blood there is no remission.*” Hebrews 9:22. But animal blood will not forgive sins (Hebrews 10:4). It was by His own blood that Christ purchased our redemption (Hebrews 9:12). “*In whom we have redemption through his blood...*” Ephesians 1:7. Sin cannot and will not be forgiven until there is the application of the blood of Christ. We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9). The song asks, “What can wash away our sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Terms Must Be met

Christ is the author of salvation, but He is only *“to them that obey him.”* Hebrews 5:9. The vengeance and wrath of God awaits those who *“know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* Second Thessalonian 1:8.

What are the terms of pardon? First, remember that salvation is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). We can never earn it or merit it. We cannot work our way by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor by our works of righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Nonetheless, there is that which God has commanded as necessary for us to receive the gift He gives. He gives us the gift when we do as directed.

We must believe in Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24). We must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). We must confess our faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10). We must be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). When we are baptized we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:31). It is then and there that we reach the saving blood of the Savior. That is when we receive the benefits of His blood. As far as the Scripture teaches, this is the right way to cover sins, and there is no other for those who have never come to Christ. We either conform to the way that God has revealed, or we shall live and die in sin, face them at the judgment with condemnation. Thank God He has given us the way that will prosper and will cover our sins.

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Religion Without Tears

Our lesson should assist us to see a side of Christianity that many overlook. This side of it even causes some to reject it. Thoughtful observers are aware that many people want a religion that is not exacting or demanding of them. The faith of Christ as revealed in the New Testament demands more than many will give. Even some professed Christians reveal an unwillingness to be inconvenienced to meet the demands of Christianity. So many want an easy religion. They want it so much that they have altered the way of Christ and tried to make it easier. Is it unfair to suggest that many religious people today

are busier than ever trying to convert God to accept them as they are rather than being converted to God's way?

But we are persuaded and would persuade you that the New Testament faith was never intended to be an easy religion to follow. It is not a new thing in the world to discover people who despise a religion that really demands something of them.

Jeroboam Tried It

Years ago a man attempted to make God's religion easier for himself and his people. After the tragic failure of the reign of Solomon and the arrogant display of folly by Rehoboam, his son, the nation of Israel divided into two nations. Judah was of the south and Israel was of the north. Jeroboam became king of the north nation. In spite of the circumstances that brought Jeroboam to power, God promised to establish his house on the throne of Israel upon certain conditions. Those conditions included faithfulness to God and obedience to His will. But Jeroboam had other ideas and decided to alter God's way of doing things because he felt that God's way was too demanding.

The Israelites were to assemble in Jerusalem for certain feast days, holy days, special seasons, and the like. Jerusalem was the location of the temple. But Jerusalem was also in Southern Judah which was under the rule and influence of Rehoboam. Jeroboam feared for his people to go there lest he lose his control over them and they be persuaded to return to Rehoboam.

"And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam, king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam, king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel and the other put he in Dan." First Kings 12:26-29.

Jeroboam pretended a concern for the people but all the while he was only concerned for his own power. But he persuaded the people that what God expected, the return to Jerusalem, was just too much, too demanding, unnecessary, too much of a hardship upon them. He relieved that problem by setting up gods in the northern and southern extremities of

Northern Israel for the people to worship. The sacred historian records, *“This thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.”* First Kings 12:30. It violated God’s instructions. The king and the people wanted an easier religion and decided to follow the altered course provided by Jeroboam.

Israel “Went Along”

It is a wonder that Jeroboam’s evil plan was so readily accepted by the people. They knew better than to “go along” with his circumvention of God’s plan. But obviously there was in the people a streak of softness and compromise to which this kind of thing had appeal. Nearly everybody likes to be comfortable and have things easy. There is no wrong in having things easy provided you do not have to violate God’s will to have it. But few are really willing to be inconvenienced for the cause of Christ. They want what they want. Their wishes and ambitions are really first with them. They do not like having to make sacrifices to serve the Lord, and if they sacrifice they do it grudgingly. Some people never seem to realize that many things that are worthwhile demand toil, sacrifice, self-denial and even tears. They find themselves torn between doing God’s will and doing what they prefer because they wish to avoid any such thing. They want a religion that demands very little of them, makes them feel comfortable, allows them to go their own way, regardless of what is best for the cause of Christ. They want a religion without tears. While they accept the idea that religion is essential to a good life, and even accept the idea that they must be Christians, they really do not like the faith of Christ if it interferes with their own way. As a result, so many are half-hearted, lukewarm, indifferent, dead, draggy, reluctant “servants.” They feel so martyred to have to serve Christ. If they could, they would change the faith and make it easier. Of course, changing the doctrine of Christ means damnation to the soul. *“Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God.”* Second John 9. Any alteration is condemned (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18,19).

Let us make personal applications of the lesson we learn from this Old Testament action by Jeroboam. After all, *“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...”* Romans 15:4.

Now Is Work Time

There is coming a time when the faithful shall rest from their labors (Revelation 14:13). But that time is not now. Now is the time of work (John 9:4). When we come to Christ we are relieved from burdens that we cannot carry successfully, but we assume His yoke which He describes as light and easy (Matthew 11:28-30). In comparison with the burden of sin, His yoke is easy. But it is still something that is demanding of us and requires something from us. Too many want the deliverance from sin that Christ gives, but they do not want to have to carry the responsibility and work of being a Christian. If they cannot have an easy life and everything they want, they feel they have been the victims of imposition.

History teaches us that the majority of people have never approved of the Christian way of life. While they love the sentimentality of Christianity, and often think on the joy and peace it offers, finding cause for rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins and the hope of the resurrection, they never want to think in terms of the work, toil, sacrifice and service that is as much a part of being a Christian as anything else. Possibly they have been so immunized against it by the teaching that salvation is by grace that they have forgotten or possibly never accepted the fact that there is work involved also. Many would consider the way of Christ only in terms of the blessings to be received but dismiss the teaching of Romans 12:1 altogether. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual service.”* This service and sacrifice part often turns some people away.

Blessings

We dare not minimize these wonderful benefits of being a Christian. There are such comforting words in the teaching of Jesus. At times when death has struck near us, in periods of sickness, trial, disappointment, we lean heavily on the consoling words of the Lord to comfort our grief and mend our broken spirits. But there are also comfortable words that are demanding, exacting and requiring. *“What do ye more than others?”* Matthew 5:47. *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* John 14:15. *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* Luke

9:23. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15. "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Luke 6:27,28. "Forgive, that your Father also may forgive you." Mark 11:25. It is entirely possible for us to block our forgiveness by refusing to be forgiving.

The uncomfortable teachings of Jesus caused people to turn away from Him when He walked among men in Palestine. "Many therefore of His disciples when they heard this said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it" Later it is recorded, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked with him no more." John 6:60,66.

Living for God is never without its costs and sacrifices. When much has been given us, much is expected from us. To complain and find fault with working and serving for the Lord's cause is to betray an unwillingness to pay the cost. It is to have the Jeroboam attitude, "It is too much."

Jeroboam Versus Jesus

Notice the contrast between Jeroboam and Jesus. While Jeroboam contended that it was too much to go to Jerusalem, years later Jesus said, "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man." Luke 18:1. The "things" that were to be "accomplished" referred to the betrayal of Jesus. His own disciples forsaking Him, His humiliation and suffering before the mockers against His claim of being God's Son. It also included the beatings, scourgings, injustices, being spat upon, the cries of mockery and contempt, and eventually the death on the cross. Did He consider it too much to go to Jerusalem? There was no other way for man to be saved, for me and you to be saved, except He do the will of the Father who had sent Him. Thankfully, He did not complain and say, "It is too much."

Many people want to be religious, but their own way. They are not very different from the priest and Levite in the story of the good Samaritan. They wanted to be religious without self-sacrifice, without service, without caring, without inconvenience, without work and concern. So many have invented ingenious and fatal ways to make the faith of Christ easier than what God requires. Crossbearing is an essential ingredient for discipleship. The words, burden, cares, duties, obligations,

thorns, trials, hardship, cross, persecution, are all a part of the Christian language. A religion without tears is without a cross to bear, but it is also without salvation. If a religion without tears is what you want, then Christianity will not supply that for you.

Two Songs

There are two songs we sing in worship that express the teaching we need to understand and which is the burden of this lesson. One stanza reads, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me."

Another reads, "Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?"

Christianity is not without its tears. But Paul wrote in Romans 8:18, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.*"

† † † † †

The Lord Looketh

"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance but the Lord looketh on the heart." First Samuel 16:7.

These majestic words were spoken by the Lord God of heaven and reveal to us one of the basic and fundamental teachings regarding the way God considers mankind. The situation that called forth these words is most interesting. Saul had been rejected by the Lord as the king of Israel because of his disobedience, arrogant pride, stubbornness and deliberate attempts to circumvent God's way. It brought Saul's ruin. Samuel grieved over Saul until God told him to go and select another king for Israel.

Samuel's Mission

Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse, a man

who had eight sons. It was from these sons that a new king would be chosen. The first that came before Samuel was Eliab, a person of strong countenance, tall and upright, a fine specimen of manhood from all outward appearances. He certainly made a good impression. But then the Lord spoke to Samuel and told him not to consider Eliab even though he seemed to be just what most would have thought would fill the need. Nonetheless, the Lord was able to see and know what men could not see and know and refused him.

These words remind us that the Lord does look with interest on each of us. That points out His concern with us. But what is the primary concern about mankind as the Lord sees things? On what does the Lord look with the greatest interest?

Appearance?

The Lord does not consider a person's physical appearance first. To be sure, we are expected to be modestly dressed, have an appearance that denotes the distinction between male and female. But in the sight of God a person is not of value or lacking in value simply because he or she may not be considered attractive physically. Some of the world's greatest characters have been people whose outstanding characteristics most certainly were not their physical attractions. In fact, many of the people of renown have been people with serious physical defects. Helen Keller was without sight, hearing, but one of the world's most remarkable people as well as very accomplished. Abraham Lincoln was known for his physical appearance, but that was because many considered him so unattractive. The impression is left that Paul may have had some kind of physical defect although we cannot ascertain just what it might have been. Some have thought it was a weakness of the eyes, lameness, or various other things. It seems that some turned away from Paul because they considered him unworthy because of his outward appearance (Second Corinthians 10:7).

Even Christ was not one to attract by physical attributes. The prophet Isaiah said of Him, "*When we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him.*" Actually, other than this phrase, there is nothing we can know about the physical appearance of Jesus. That within itself ought tell us that God does not place a great emphasis on outward beauty as people are so inclined to do.

There is an old proverb that we heard when we were young

that mother would often say to our sister, “Pretty is as pretty does.” Another was, “Beauty is only skin deep.”

Peter, Paul, James

Peter did teach the women to be concerned about the “*hidden man of the heart*” more than their outward adorning (First Peter 3:3-5). Paul taught the necessity of modesty (First Timothy 2:9,10). But their urging was more on the inward godliness than outward appearance.

This does not mean that slovenness, an unkempt and “don’t care” appearance is all right because that reflects an attitude of the heart that is uncomplimentary. But whereas Samuel might have thought Eliab would be the one to replace Saul because he looked good, God taught him, and us, that there is something far more important than that.

Did not James rebuke brethren that gave the chief places to those with the gold finery and looked down on those of more modest situations? This kind of discrimination due to appearance is not acceptable to God.

Social Standing

There are many people in the world who are impressed with a persons social position. There is a mad craze among some elements of society to be among those who are in certain social circles with social status as if that really counted for something. While we all should desire to be as socially acceptable as we can among Christian people, many have a distorted view as to what is and is not the right kind of society. How young people are obsessed with the idea of being accepted socially! They will sometimes even compromise principles of right and wrong if it will get them “in” with certain social groups. Some have such a passion to be socially prominent, or at least socially recognized as acceptable among the prominent people of the world.

The family of David was not among the socially prominent of their time, yet David was the one chosen to be the next king. Not a single one of the apostles were among those considered high in society of that day. They were humble, hard working, unlearned people. Hardly is there a wider span than that between a free man and a slave. Yet, Paul said, “*There is neither bond nor free... in Christ.*” Galatians 3:28.

Social prominence, social activities are often nothing but

vanity and foolishness which many flit here and there trying to capture and enjoy, and once they have it, they have a bag of wind, and even the bag has holes in it. So what? Social standing may occupy the minds of those whose thinking is dwarfed regarding what really matters, but it is of no major concern to the Almighty. Strange that so many of those who claim to be His children would place such emphasis on it.

Race

Nor does God consider one's racial background like people seem to consider it. One of the world's great tensions throughout history has been racial hatred and prejudice. That differences exist cannot be denied. That it is expedient to mix and mingle the races is a matter that cannot be set aside with the wave of the hand one way or the other. But as far as one's worth and spiritual value in the sight of God, race has no place.

There exists a false aristocracy and a "better-than-thou" attitude among so many simply because of their ancestry. Some of the most shoddy kind of people think themselves special and better than others just because of their skin tone. But such is not so with God.

"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." Acts 10:34,35. After all, Paul said we are all of one blood (Acts 17:26). There is no "super race." Each race does have traits that mark them from others. But that has no spiritual significance, at least, not to God.

The gospel is for all. The great commission teaches, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* Mark 16:15. The same message is for everyone. There is no difference (Acts 15:9). *"There is neither Jew nor Greek."* Galatians 3:28. *"Whosoever will"* means just exactly that. God does not look at one's race as do men.

Wealth

God is not impressed, as people are, with how many riches a person may have. A person is not acceptable or unacceptable before God based on his bank account or his stock holdings, or lack of them. Some have developed the idea that being poor necessarily makes a person better in some way, while other have the idea that being rich means you are more pleasing to God

than others. Actually, having more of this world's goods really means you have more over which to exercise stewardship and for which you shall give an account as to how you used it. Neither wealth nor poverty declares a person's real worth.

Some feel so secure if they have money. They think themselves more important, even in the church. It has been known for people to be placed in positions of leadership based more on what they have than what they are. Riches, improperly received and improperly used, can be and will be a curse to the one who has them. The love of money has caused some to even turn away from the faith (First Timothy 6:10).

Compared to most people in our world, nearly all of us in America might be considered wealthy. This only means we have a greater responsibility than others.

When Jesus was watching the giving of some, He observed how the rich gave of their abundance, but how the widow gave of her very living with great sacrifice. He said she had given more than all of them (Mark 12:44).

We may be able to impress those around us with our possessions, but God is not impressed. We may think ourselves somewhat because of what we have, but that is not what measures with God. Material success does not even imply spiritual success. Consider the "rich fool" of Luke 12, who thought all was well simply because he had abundance.

What God Sees

What does God see? On what does He look? Back to our text and we learn that God looks on the inner man most of all. He sees the heart, that realm into which men cannot see. But God can and does see. He sees the real "you" and the real "me." While God is concerned with man's deeds and words, He is also concerned with man's motives and intents. He considers his thoughts. On these things He is capable of rendering judgments that are prohibited to us. Attempts to make "heart judgments" are forbidden to us (Matthew 7:1-4).

The heart is the secret spring of our lives. "*As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.*" Proverbs 23:7. It is not that we are what we think we are. But we are what we think. For this reason let us heed Proverbs 4:23, "*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*" Christ said, "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*" Matthew 12:34.

Again, it is needful to remind us that this does not mean God

is unconcerned about our actions and outward deeds. It only means that He considers our attitudes as well as our actions. Our motives and intentions must be right as well as our deeds and words.

Man's Limitation

Man looks only on the outward appearance because that is all that he is capable of doing. Outward appearance can be deceiving, misleading and does not always reveal the true person. A person may have good intentions and do something wrong. Or he may appear to do something worthy but all the while he has an evil motive behind it. Man can only see the outward. But God does not look as does man. God sees the outward and the inward. God knows whether or not our hearts are pure as they should be.

Certainly, when our hearts are pure, our lives will reflect it. But what is reflected may not always be just exactly what really is. It is sobering as well as comforting to be reminded that our Judge at the last day will see things as He does, and not as other people may see them. That thought should sober us to "clean up the heart" as well as rejoice in the knowledge that God knows.

Things that seem so large in life to people are not that large before God. Physical appearance, social position, racial ancestry, financial status, all such things loom so big before people. But not so with our God. God looks on the heart. So our prayer should be, and our efforts directed toward, "Purer in heart. O God, help me to be." Our hearts are purified in obedience to the truth, the word of God (First Peter 1:22). As I ask myself, so may you ask yourself, "Is thy heart right with God?"

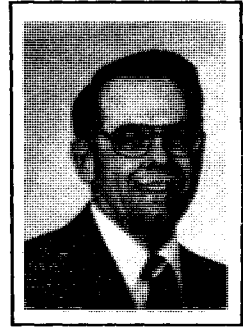
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A Big Change Coming

During the month of July of this year the Boyd family expects to move into Tennessee, near the city of McMinnville. A variety of personal and family circumstances has caused us to think this is the expedient thing to do at this time. We are going to buy a home and use that are as our base of operations.

This will also change the form of the preaching work I am now doing. I hope to preach in that area, hold meetings, especially in places that cannot afford gospel meetings but need them nonetheless. I will be looking for support for those meetings. I intend to continue producing this booklet as well as other writings I have in mind.

Our four year stay with the East Main church has been pleasant throughout the time. The association with the leadership has never been anything but harmonious and cooperative on the part of everyone. The church defends the faith and stands strong for the truth. But sometimes conditions arise in the life of a family that necessitate some major changes in what you do and where you do it. Such is the case with us. I'll tell you more about it next time.



JAMES W. BOYD

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