

Encouraging Statements Of The Bible

Michael Hatcher, Editor

2001 Bellview Lectures

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Encouraging Statements Of The Bible

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PREFACE

Last year's Annual Bellview Lectureship dealt with *Sad Statements of The Bible*. As a complementary volume to that lectureship we are now engaging in statements which encourage the Christian. There has not been a Christian who, at one time or another, has not become discouraged in his Christian life. Thus, we have all experienced the need to be encouraged or built up so we can faithfully discharge our Christian responsibility.

This lectureship would not be what it is without so many brethren and the work which they so willingly give of their time and effort. There are so many who work behind the scenes to get things done who do not receive the recognition of others, but without their work this lectureship would not continue. We thank each one of these faithful servants of our Lord. We also thank those who have gone before who played such important roles with this congregation and lectureship.

There are thirty-three different men who wrote manuscripts for this book and twenty-nine who will be speaking. These men have shown their faithfulness to God and His Word through the years. Their love for souls is manifest in the work they do. We appreciate the extra time they put in their busy schedules for the writing of these chapters. Denise Mowery, the secretary, puts in many hours in formatting and reading the manuscripts. Without her help and dedication this work would be greatly hindered. Gary Summers has once again given invaluable aid in proofreading all the chapters written and used his expertise in producing a quality work. He does this without any remuneration and only because of his love for God and the church.

Some twenty-six years ago, brother Bill Cline, in conjunction with the Bellview Preacher Training School, began this lectureship under the capable oversight of the Bellview elders. Since that time, this lecture series has done untold good for the church of Christ. Under the continued oversight of the elders of this congregation, this work has remained on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. The members of the congregation have continued to support her fine elders and this work with their time, money, and effort. We send this book out with the prayer that it will encourage you in living for Him who died for us.

*Michael Hatcher, Director
March 19, 2001*

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ENCOURAGEMENT

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.



Keith Mosher, Sr. and his wife Dorothy have been married for thirty-nine years. They have three children: Keith, Jr., Mark, and Karen, and five grandchildren.

He is a 1975 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and has B. A., M.A., and M.Th. degrees from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Ministry from Harding Graduate School of Religion.

He has worked with congregations in Mississippi and Tennessee. Keith speaks at gospel meetings and lectureships throughout the states. He has done mission work in Asia, Africa, and Russia. He is a full-time instructor at Memphis School of Preaching and currently serves as Dean of Academics.

Keith has written two workbooks on Romans and Acts, a tract entitled “Can One Trust His English Bible?” and articles for various publications. He is a staff writer for *Bible Light* and has recently finished a book on inspiration, *The Book God Breathed*.

All of the past Bellview lectureship books are on shelves in my office and rightly so, for those volumes are priceless resources for study. No doubt this study of *Encouraging Statements of the Bible* will also take its place of value with the former texts. How great it is to know that the Bible is replete with passages that edify, exhort, and encourage Christians to greater faith, service, and hope. My deepest gratitude is extended to brethren Brantley, Gallaher, and Stancliff for their **encouragement** and direction of the lectures and to my good brother and friend, Michael Hatcher, for coordinating such a monumental effort. It is, to me, a privilege to be invited to Bellview for the lectures and to be associated in Christ with “like-minded” brethren who love the truth and who defend it with their very resources and lives. Such brethren’s efforts **encourage** an entire brotherhood.

INTRODUCTION

The apostle, Paul, instructed Christians not to be “weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). Surely, all who “live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12) and need not faint (become discouraged in service to God). From

just the preceding two verses one can successfully argue that from time to time (if not all the time) Christians need encouragement.

To facilitate a study of the tremendously broad subject of *Encouragement*, the outline here followed concerns the causes of discouragement, word studies, and applications. Brethren need to learn that the family of God needs provoking “unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24). Why? Because there are none who live their entire lives without trouble, tiredness, and temptation.

Not even the Christ was exempt from becoming wearied (John 4:6), from being tempted (Heb. 4:15), and from persecution (Mat. 27:35). All of God’s children need edifying all of the time, for one of Satan’s best weapons is to cause discouragement in the hearts of Christians. The following poem was written, in a time of darkness, by one of Christ’s followers, when no one was encouraging her:

She stands silent, with eyes aflame,
 A disease inside her without a name.
 No cure for the illness locked inside,
 She just keeps searching for an eternal high.
 There is a gnawing and eating away of her life—
 Too late to heal; too late to fight.
 Love is kept muffled by her agonizing pain,
 And is gone for giving, all is vain.
 No more mourning! No more tears!
 She won’t let the pain touch her or bring back the fears.
 She tries to be normal and forget the past,
 But the scars are too deep and forever will last.
 Ignoring her problem seems to be best;
 Then she can pretend to be happy and blessed.
 The pain brings hatred and pain to her heart,
 It doesn’t kill you, just tears you apart.
 Her pain is so common, it happens every day,
 And she wonders what happened—who went astray?
 If she could see the pain eating at her brain,
 It would appear a black hole, filled up with rain.
 She’s loved, yet hated; she’s blind to the pain;
 She’s proud, full of spirit, morale does not wane.
 Goodbye Old Man, bring in the new;
 For the pain has overtaken; the old man is through (Ellis, 137).

Such despair as noted above by the poetess is not only not rare, but is a part of far too many Christians’ lives. The church today needs real love, true family devotion, and sincere, heart-felt encouragement.

DISCOURAGEMENT: CAUSE

Webster defines *discouragement*, as “being deprived of courage or confidence” (326). In fact, the discerning reader will observe that *courage* is between *dis* and *ment*, and to remove *courage* leaves nothing pronounceable nor desirable. Some may feel that God’s children ought never to lose confidence, but the Lord Himself knew that in the human condition, discouragement is possible for He said to Joshua:

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it *to* the right hand or *to* the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Jos. 1:6-7).

The Lord would not have had to encourage Joshua had discouragement in the latter’s life not been possible. What can cause one who belongs to God to lose his confidence?

In the first place one may not keep one’s focus on heaven: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). A Christian’s life must have proper direction and focus on things spiritual (Ecc. 12:13). However, many will measure themselves against others, or compare themselves to others, or even focus on the foibles and hypocrisies of others. Paul insisted that such thinking is “not wise” and Christians “dare not” do such (2 Cor. 10:12). Some, in fact, *join* the church because they like the people; but when the people let them down, they become discouraged and quit. Christians must set their thoughts “on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2). The apostle Paul suffered nearly everything imaginable that life has to offer, including martyrdom (2 Cor. 11:23-30; 2 Tim. 4:6-8). However, Paul had learned the **one** right thing to do and that was to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phi. 3:14).

In the second place, too many are prone to counting their bad points and experiences and not their good points and blessings, and thus they become discouraged. “This **negative thinking** even becomes a pattern for far too many who view life as a succession of burdens, obstacles, and defeats in a world which is *going down the drain*” (Beck, 255). Too, such negativity leads to an incorrect view of self as “deficient, inadequate, unworthy, and incapable of performing adequately” (Beck,

255). The latter thinking leads to self-blame and self-pity and a dim view of the future as filled with more “hardship and frustration” (Beck, 255). The Bible admonition is **not** to be overly anxious about anything (Phi. 4:6-7) and to “do all things without murmurings and disputings” (Phi. 2:14). Two Christians were overheard speaking about getting old. One replied that “considering the alternative,” he preferred to get older. The *alternative* is paradise and that Christian, though probably joking, spoke volumes about the attitudes many have toward life. If God sent His Son to die for me, **I** must be worth something (John 3:16)! Too many think **too** little of life and self.

A third reason or cause of discouragement is that many count their *cursings* and not their *blessings*. However, if the Christ is truly Lord of one’s life there will be far more good than bad (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:28; Mark 8:36-37). Christians are to consider themselves “dead” and their lives “hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). One cannot kill or hurt a *dead* person, speaking physically, and that one who has died to self spiritually will not be overcome by anything life can offer, for that one counts his blessings and remains spiritually focused. No trial one can suffer is any greater than anyone else’s difficulty, but God is faithful and He is the way of escape from the temporary obstacle (1 Cor. 10:13).

In the fourth place some get discouraged because they seek *success* in the business of being a Christian. However, God requires **faithfulness**—not some worldly-envisioned result (Rev. 2:10). A Christian once complained that preachers were paid too much and should be put on commission and remunerated at “so much per baptism.” The preacher countered that the church could not afford such an arrangement for one soul was worth the whole world (cf., Mat. 16:26)! Many get discouraged in serving the Lord because the numbers of converts do not keep rising at some geometric rate or because many are not behaving as they ought. The challenge is to be faithful in obeying God, not in counting noses. God gives the increase, not man (1 Cor. 3:6).

ENCOURAGEMENT: WORD STUDIES

It is unusual to report, perhaps, but the English *encouragement*, is not found in the King James Version. However, the American Standard (1901) has it at Acts 18:27, 1 Thessalonians 2:11 and 5:14, at John 11:19 and 31, and at Hebrews 6:18. However, the Greek terms are not the same in each passage.

In Acts 18:27, the inspired historian, Luke, wrote that the brethren had been urged to “encourage” (*protrepantai*) themselves (Greek middle voice) in the matter of receiving Apollos, a former false teacher (Acts 18:25) into their company. The original term means something like “to urge forward” or “to persuade” (Vine, 366).

However at 1 Thessalonians 2:11 and 5:14 along with John 11:19 and 31, the term is *paramutheomai* which means “counsel” or “advice” (Vine, 366). The noun form of the latter Greek word is found in 1 Corinthians 14:3 where it is translated “edifieth” and in Philippians 2:1 where it is rendered “consolation.”

The term in Hebrews 6:18 translated “encouragement” in the American Standard and “consolation” in the King James is *paraklesis*, the literal meaning of which is to “call to one’s side” (cf., “Comforter,” John 14:26) in order to plead the cause of the one called (Vine, 366). Synonyms for *parakaleo* in English are “comfort,” “consolation,” “exhortation,” and “entreaty.” Synonyms in English for *paramutheomai* (above) and *protrepo* (above) are nearly the same as for *parakaleo*, and all could be translated “comfort.” Each term has the sense of edifying or building up (Vine, 366).

In the etymological study of *parakaleo* (“comfort”), “advocate” surfaces as an English interpretation (Schmitz, 5:773-779, 788-799; Stahlin, 5:779-788). *Parakletos* (Behm, 5:800-814) can be traced to the fourth century before Christ in the sense of a “person called in to help, summoned to give assistance” (Behm, 801). The Greek translators of the Old Testament who produced the Septuagint, several hundred years before Christ came, did not use the term because an advocate would have been very “unusual Jewish usage” (Behm, 5:801). However, the Jewish scholar Philo who was enamored of Greek philosophy, used *parakletos* (the noun) and consistently meant “advocate” in his usage (Behm, 5:802).

In the New Testament, *parakletos* is used only by John. In 1 John 2:1 Jesus is said to be the “advocate” for sinning Christians, and the idea of Christ’s being called to argue a Christian’s *case* before God is clearly meant. However, *parakletos* also is found in John 14:16 where reference is made to the Holy Spirit as “another” (Greek, of the same kind) comforter or advocate (cf., John 16:8-11). The Holy Spirit is not the *lawyer* for the apostles, however, nor their *defender* before God, but their *counsel* in relationship to the message those apostles were to bring

to the world (John 16:13-14). *Parakletos* **never** connects the Holy Spirit to any but the apostles and should not be used to apply to Christians today. In fact, Behm argues that:

The only thing one can say for certain is that the sense of “comforter” favored by, for example, Wycliffe, Luther, and the A.V. [King James] in John’s gospel does not fit any of the New Testament passages (5:804).

As far as encouragement, *parakletos* means a legal counsel, and only Jesus can do this for Christians (1 John 2:1). The idea of a *helper* comes from the gnostic (Mandaean) and post-Old Testament Jewish thought, but not from Greek New Testament usage (Behm, 5:807).

Paramutheomai is quite different from *parakletos* and has the sense of “speaking to someone by coming close to his side” (Stahlin, 5:816-823). In fact, the basic sense is to “speak to someone in a friendly way” (Stahlin, 5:816-823). John used *paramutheomai* in John 11:19 to describe how the Jews came to “comfort” (KJV) Mary and Martha who were sorrowing over their brother Lazarus’ death (cf., also John 11:31). Paul used *paramutheomai* in 1 Thessalonians 2:11 in reminding those first-century brethren how he had “comforted” them as a father does his children and in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 to warn the brethren to be mindful to “encourage” or “comfort” the feeble minded.¹

A synonym for *encouragement*, and translated “comfort” (KJV) the only time it is used in the New Testament, is *paregoria* (Col. 4:11) (Vine, 210). The medicine paregoric, which is used to ease irritation, gets its name from the ancient Greek word. *Paregoria* meant “solace” or “consolation” or “soothing,” and in Colossians 4:11 Paul spoke of his fellow workers as being of such soothing “comfort” to him. (Certainly encouragement should have a calming effect on others.)

Another synonym and another singular New Testament usage is found in Philippians 2:19 where *eupsucho* is translated “good comfort” (Vine, 210). The author, Paul, expected that the arrival of Timothy (Paul was in prison) would be a very good encouragement to the apostle.

Paraineo is also a synonym for encouragement and is found in several New Testament passages and translated “admonished” (Acts 27:9) and “I exhort” (Acts 27:22) (Vine, 400). The sense of this latter term is “to give advice” in order to encourage. There are other, closely related, New Testament terms such as “besech” (*erotao*) (e.g., Phi.

4:3), “beg” (*paraiteoual*) (e.g., Heb. 12:19), “entreaty” (*paraklesis*) (e.g., 2 Cor. 8:4), and “edify.” This latter term deserves a little more attention.

The original word translated “edify” or “edification” is *oikodomos* a noun translated “builders” (Acts 4:11); *oikodome* a noun translated as “building” or “building up” (Rom. 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3ff; Mat. 24:1; 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 2:21; et al); and *oikodomeo* a verb, literally or figuratively, translated “to build” (Vine, 357-358). Particularly important to this study of encouragement is the following summary from Michel who wrote of the individual Christian’s participation in the building up of the church and the development of the spiritual growth of a brother in Christ.

The individual helps to edify the community by receiving for himself the exhortation of the Gospel and then passing it on to others. Important, then, in relation to the term [*oikodome*] is 1. The relation of the individual to the whole. 2. The mutual interrelationship of the individual members. 3. The spiritual and charismatic [he means this in the Calvinistic or direct-led sense, and misuses the term here] character of the process of growth, which aims at fullness and completion and is not to be limited to morality nor wrongly construed in sentimental nor emotional terms, and 4. the theological consideration. The individual Christian contributes to the building and up building because this is absolutely the true work of God or Christ (5:136-159).

The discerning student will note a direct link between *oikodomeo* and *parakletos* (to edify; to comfort). By the inspired Word the Christian community is to be comforted, solaced, and built up in its life of faith (1 Cor. 14:3). Even when Christians had miraculous gifts and could do marvelous works, the sole intent was *edification, exhortation, and comfort* (1 Cor. 14:36). There is no encouragement, then, apart from the Word of God and from the Christian community. In the word, *oikodomeo*, is concealed the idea of community, which indicates the church’s goal of knowledge and inner strength for each member **from** the encouragement of every other member. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24).

Perhaps an antithetic usage, by Paul, of *oikodomeo* will help to strengthen one’s understanding of *building up* a brother and the church. Paul spoke of building again the things which he destroyed; a reference to whom the apostle’s former efforts were under the law of Moses (Gal. 2:18). Could Paul ever encourage spiritual growth in others by tearing down his present Christian state and returning to Judaism? No!

To yield to the Judaizer's teaching would not only be error, such error would **destroy** Paul as a Christian. A Christian cannot be **encouraged** in the faith, if he is in error and is not **admonished** to come out of that error. Perhaps this latter idea is behind Peter's description of Christians as "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5—ASV). Brethren are to be building blocks not stumbling stones.

APPLICATIONS

There is a vital need for consolation, edification, entreaty—encouragement—in today's congregational communities. One gospel preacher has filled his local bulletins with a study of encouragement by using each letter of **encourage** in acrostic fashion to teach that everyone is **now** committed to the Lord to **overcome** the devil; to **uphold** the Word of God; to **respect** the Word; to **assemble** with the saints to **glorify** God; and to **endure** (Joseph). The acrostic is a wonderful reminder that saints **need** encouragement and must **give** encouragement just as the word studies above also show. Where is encouragement needed?

In the first place, saints need building up in their understanding of what God wants them to know. Evidently the church at Ephesus had forgotten that God had made them "sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6); for the apostle Paul penned them an entire letter trying to help them (and therefore Christians for all time) to understand that there was: (1) The hope of their calling (Eph. 1:18a). The calling was by the gospel or truth (2 The. 2:14). The hope was generated by a pre-determined plan, buoyed by a present redemption, and confirmed in the knowledge of a future heavenly bless (Eph. 1:4-5, 7, 10). (2) The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18b). Christians **must** be encouraged by the knowledge that in the battle for souls between God and the devil, God's children were His *inheritance* (Greek, *trophies*) because God had won. (3) The exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe (Eph. 1:19a). That power of God in Christian lives is exerted through the gospel and results in spirit and life (Rom. 1:16; John 6:63). Every Christian should know to be encouraged by hope, by being God's inheritance, and by knowing that God is at work in His children's lives.

In the second place, Christians need to be encouraged by the fact of **who** they are. After Paul finished describing that the Ephesian saints had been *dead* in trespasses and sins until they had been saved by

God's grace through faith (the gospel system), he then wrote that he had now unveiled the mystery of God to the Ephesians so they would know what Paul knew (Eph. 3:1-4). That *mystery* was **not** revealed until the gospel of Christ was preached, and neither the Old Testament **prophets**, nor the **angels** of God, nor any **man** had known it until Christianity (i.e., the church) began (1 Pet. 1:10-12; Eph. 3:5-9). The *mystery* was that God intended that there be one group of saved people on the earth who would manifest His wisdom and glorify His name. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). Every Christian is the end-product of all that God pre-determined, prepared, promised, and planned through the Christ and His humiliation (Phi. 2:5-11). When a Christian realizes **who** he really is, that saint will begin to set his affection on things above and will be encouraged to take proper, spiritual pride in his position in God's scheme of redemption. After all, Christians are God's *sons* (1 John 3:1-3).

In the third place, Christians need to be encouraged by the fact that a multitude of Old and New Testament verses were written to comfort and edify. For example, when one reads of the universal wickedness of the antediluvian world, one also reads (nearly immediately) that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:8). Further, when all men seemed to be idolatrous, God found Abraham to use to begin the family of Christ (Gen. 12:1-3). And, when the ancient family seemed in despair, Joseph came, then Moses, Joshua, Ruth, and even little Joash (the last of Jesus' seed-line of that generation and saved by a nurse) arose in the history of Christ's seed-line with the message that even one person can encourage an entire generation in faithfulness to God! Time would fail to afford a discussion of Micaiah, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and a host of others who endured, exhorted, and encouraged all generations of God's people to be "stedfast, unmoveable" (1 Cor. 15:58; Heb. 11). It is no wonder that Isaiah would say to his generation:

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *even* God *with* a recompence; he will come and save you (Isa. 35:3-4).

And, Paul would write to this generation:

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phi. 4:12-13).

In the fourth place, Christians are to encourage, build-up, entreat, and comfort one another. Such activity itself is encouraging since one has the knowledge that an entire family of God's people is helping one another get to heaven. Paul wrote, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*" (1 The. 5:14). Some are weak in knowledge and others weak in character so each one needs the kind of encouragement befitting their life situation: some need restoring (Gal. 6:1), some need re-teaching (Jam. 5:19-20), some need provoking to love and good works (Heb. 10:24). Everyone needs to be steadfast in encouraging one another.

In the fifth place, encouragement is needed so brethren will not feel as if they are *all alone* in standing for truth (cf., 1 Kin. 19:10). So many false doctrines, changes, and apostate brethren have emerged in recent years that even the faithful and the strong are getting discouraged. In fact, brethren are debating brethren in unprecedented numbers over the Holy Spirit, fellowship, and a host of other issues. Perhaps some brethren need to study 1 Corinthians 6:1 and learn the principle there, and some brethren need to quit seeking an issue just to please themselves. There are so many *voices* that the Bible itself is being drowned out in the din. All the foregoing is discouraging, but is not a new phenomenon. Jesus and all the apostles faced controversy, condemnation, and cruel attack, but none but one (Judas) quit. Jesus went to the cross, the apostles went to martyrdoms or exile, and all Christians are urged to be "faithful into death" to obtain the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). These are crucial times in the church, but these times are not for quitters. God still needs men and women to stand in the gap and be counted.

In the sixth place, Christians need to draw encouragement from the fact that God's Word is eternal and able to build them up and to give them an inheritance among all them that are sanctified (Acts 20:32). Those who are discouraged by sin in their lives need to know that the Word of God hidden in the heart will solve the problem (Psa. 119:11; Mat. 4:1-11). Those who are discouraged by false doctrine, innovations, and evil, need to realize that God's Word will bring all such to

captivity (2 Cor. 10:1-4). Those discouraged by a trespassing brother will draw encouragement from the Word that there exists a process to solve the problem (Mat. 18:15-22). Those fighting spiritual boredom will be renewed to know that there is life, itself, in the Word of God (John 6:63). Those disheartened by marital problems will be edified when studying Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5, and those facing death will feel real, deep, spiritual joy to know a crown awaits in a reserved place (2 Tim. 4:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:4-5).

CONCLUSION

Encouragement even sounds nice when one says it. To be able to have one's inner courage renewed is a marvelous hope. It is also the case that all need edifying, and no Christian should ever be so proud as to be embarrassed to seek a brother's help. Christians are their brothers' keepers (Gal. 6:1). May all be **encouraged to encourage** and to receive **encouragement**.

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ENDNOTE

¹Since *protrepo* is found only once in the New Testament at Acts 18:27, evidently the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* editors did not find it necessary to do an etymological study.

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

GENESIS 1:26-27

Clifford Newell, Jr.



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INTRODUCTION

In the early morning hours of time the three persons of the Godhead, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit are present and engaging in divine counsel before creating man, and then, creating him according to plan, and creating him in their *image* after their *likeness*. Man is described in this way to focus attention upon his importance, the climax of God's earthly creation and for whom all the rest had been made. No such consultation is described in regards to previous life forms. The Record states:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

THE CASE IS THAT MAN WAS MADE (CREATED)

Man was made to be a sovereign over these vast dominions, tributary only to his Maker. He was made in the image of God, that he might possess godlike dominion and godlike delights, and that in him God might be glorified. We are like the Psalmist when he penned: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful

of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psa. 8:3-4). Man is represented as a created, not an evolved, being. He did not develop over a long period of time from existing life forms. The Bible declares that man is a being, created by God (Gen. 1:26-27). The Bible states further that God **formed** the first human body from the dust of the earth, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). Jehovah said to the Pharisees:

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made [created] them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? (Mat. 19:4-5).

Paul stated that God made the world and all things therein (Acts 17:24-28). So, man is here—this is a fact. He is here either as the product of God’s creation, or as the product of organic evolution. It is a matter of “either/or,” and there is no other possibility. If not by creation, then it is by evolution; if not by evolution, then by creation. If man is the product of evolution, then at some time in the past some non-human gave birth to a human, or some non-human gave birth to a non-human which must have been transformed into a human.

Those who defend evolution have advanced the argument that the two Hebrew words used in Genesis 1 to speak of the creation must mean entirely different things. They suggest that the Hebrew word *bara* (used in Gen. 1:1, 21, 27) means “to create” while *asah* means to “re-create” or to “make over.” Hence, the original creation was *created*, while the creation of the six days was *made* (i.e., re-created following an initial destruction). The Bible states that God “made” (*asah*) man (Gen. 1:26). Then inspiration states that God “created” (*bara*) man. Consider Genesis 1:1 and 2:4 as God “created” (*bara*) the heavens and the earth, while Exodus 20:11 states that in six days God “made” (*asah*) the heavens and the earth. The Genesis 2:4 reference is highly significant in that within this one verse the Holy Spirit guided Moses’ to pen: “These *are* the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were **created**, in the day that the LORD God **made** the earth and the heavens.” Genesis 1:21 states that God “created” (*bara*) great sea creatures, while Genesis 1:25 states that He “made” (*asah*) the beasts of the earth. Friends, the obvious conclusion is that the two words are synonyms; there is no distinction!

In accounting for the origin of man, the Bible declares, “And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). From this factual statement one learns that: God is eternal, God is the creator of the universe, the world was created through Jesus Christ, and that God created man. This rules out any theory that man evolved by any process of evolution from some lower non-human form. The evidence is here and it demands that man is a being—an amazing being—created by God!

THE CASE IS THAT MAN WAS MADE IN THE IMAGE OF DEITY AFTER THEIR LIKENESS

The idea that God created man after their likeness can hardly have reference to the shape of man’s physical body. God is spirit (John 4:24) rather than flesh. And man is a spirit being as well as a flesh-and-blood being. So it must be his inward nature that is in the image of God. This is more than physical animation, for animals also have that. But man has something the animals do not have. There is no perceptible difference in the meaning of these expressions, but the thought is repeated for emphasis. Errett wrote:

Man is something higher than the animal nature which he possesses in common with the brute creation. We are reminded of what Paul spoke of man’s being “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10), and of his being created anew, “after God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Here are the grand features of the divine likeness—knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Is it any wonder that the Scriptures state, “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” (Psa. 8:5-6) (1:9-11).

The Greeks had two words, “soul” (*psuche*) and “spirit” (*pneuma*), used in contrast with the fleshy body, both of which are employed in the New Testament Scriptures. Often they are used interchangeably for the inward man, without any distinction whatsoever. Sometimes, however, they are differentiated, as in the following:

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 The. 5:23). When a distinction is made, *psuche* (soul) has reference to physical animation which man and animals have in common, whereas *pneuma* (spirit) designates that part of man that differentiates him from the animals and makes him akin to God in a way that they are not. It must be this part of man that is created in the image of God.

Let us observe what has been said of others regarding *image* and *likeness*. Clarke said in reference to man:

In our image, after our likeness. What is said here refers to his soul. This was made in the image and likeness of God...The image and likeness must necessarily be intellectual; his mind, his soul, must have been formed after the nature and perfections of his God (1:38).

Spence and Exell argued that the meaning expressed dominion on the part of man.

In Our Image denotes the shadow outline of a figure. ‘Image’ is from the word (*tselem*) and means “to carve” or “to cut off.” “After our likeness” denotes the correspondence or resemblance of that shadow to the figure. What follows is one direction in which the possession of the image of God on the part of man expresses itself—dominion over the earth (or to master). It is believed that 3 things are consisted in this idea: (1) in the spirituality of his being, as an intelligent and free agent; (2) in the moral integrity and holiness of his nature; and (3) in his dominion over the creatures. Man is God’s crowning masterpiece (1:30-31).

Leupold noted that:

Man is not only made after the deliberate plan and purpose of God but is also very definitely patterned after Him... Taking the verse as a whole, we cannot but notice that it sets forth the picture of a being that stands on a very high level, a creature of singular nobility and endowed with phenomenal powers and attributes, not a type of being that by its brute imperfections is seen to be on the same level with the animal world, but a being that towers high above all other creatures, their king and their crown... From every point of view man is seen to be the crown and climax of God’s creation (1:92-93).

Leupold further observed: “The common explanation, perhaps the most popular at present, that God is addressing the angels has shown up in its deficiencies by Koenig” (1:87). *Let us* is to be understood as referring to Deity Gen. 1:26-27; Isa. 9:6; etc. However, man has not always shown the proper respect for Jehovah or His Word.

IMPLICATIONS OF MAN BEING MADE IN THE IMAGE OF DEITY

The implications of man being made in the image and likeness of Deity are many. In the first place, man is a rational being. There is drawn from Genesis 1:26-27 that man is a rational being with the ability to think, reason, and choose. These are attributes of the human mind. This mind clearly differentiates man from the lower animal creation. And, it is this particular characteristic or attribute of man to which God addresses Himself. God—through His written revelation, the Bible—speaks to the mind of man.

God commands all men to study His will (2 Tim. 2:15). We are obligated and privileged to learn God's will, to do God's will, and then to teach His will to others (2 Tim. 2:2). Further, we are commanded to, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 The. 5:21). To man alone has God granted the marvelous privilege of prayer—the privilege of talking to God (Rom. 10:1-3), a privilege inherent in man's rationality.

Second, man is a free moral being. After man was created we are introduced to Genesis 3 which records the transgression of Adam and the entrance of sin into the world which God had made for man (Rom. 5:12). Why did God make man capable of sinning? The answer lies in the question itself—the fact that God did make man. If God had made this creature so he could not sin, this creature would have been a machine, a robot. He would not have been man.

Involved in man's rationality is his capability of being a moral being. In fact, man has the capacity to be properly concerned about what is right and what is wrong—to be concerned about God's will. God wants men to come to Him, to love Him. But He wants them to come and to love on their own free will. God respects man's free moral agency—God does not violate man's free will.

Calvinism has influenced many in the religious world regarding man being a free moral being. Calvinism avers that every baby born into the world is a sinner; that God, from all eternity foreordained and predestinated unconditionally those who would be saved and the number is unalterable. They emphasize that Christ is the atonement only for the limited elect; that the limited elect cannot resist the irresistible grace effected by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, which gives life not only to the elect dead sinners but also to the Word

(without which it is merely a dead letter); and, that the limited elect will persevere to the end, will be saved, without the loss of a single one.

The Calvinistic system teaches that the sin of Adam resulted in the total corruption or depravity of man; that he has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so he is dead in sin and not able to do anything for his salvation, or to even prepare himself to salvation. They use such proof-texts as Ephesians 2:3; Romans 5:12; and Psalm 51:5.

Paul speaks in regards of the Ephesians that they were “by nature the children of wrath.” But we are children of wrath by nature in the sense of long practice of our own sins, not Adam’s. “Nature” (*phusis*) is defined as “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature” (Thayer, 660). The idea that death has passed upon all men for all have sinned in Romans 5 simply states the fact that all have sinned, we all go astray, we are not born astray (Isa. 53:6). The expression in Psalm 51:5, that “in sin did my mother conceive me,” simply teaches that the writer was conceived in a world that was full of sin. Actually, sin is something you do not inherit (Eze. 18:20).

Did sin change our nature? Did man’s fall change his nature to that of possessing a sinful nature? It is highly unfortunate that some of the modern speech translations have improperly translated “flesh” (*sarx*) as sinful nature. Wallace wrote:

The eighth chapter of Romans is the epitome of the false doctrine of original sin insinuated promiscuously into Paul’s epistles of the New International Version. It is slyly ensconced within the sinister phrase “our sinful nature,” which nowhere occurs in the New Testament but inserted nine times in Romans 8 in the New International (700).

The truth is that man does not possess a sinful nature—his nature is of God, and he becomes a sinner. How did Adam become a sinner? If Adam inherited sin, as he was “the son of God,” he would have derived sin from God. The very definition of sin denotes a falling short, a missing the mark, the going beyond, or simply a failure to do what one knows ought to be done. How could the above statements be inherited? Further, the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3 descends to Adam—so if the *New International Version* of “our sinful nature” is true—Jesus inherited the sin of Adam and was therefore by human nature a sinner! Friends, that is the inevitable consequence of original sin or man’s sinful nature as per the *New International Version*.

Let us observe the following:

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself (John 7:17).

In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink (John 7:37).

Come unto me, all *ye* that labour 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 (Mat. 11:28-30).

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:8-9).

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

Man has the right to come, the ability to come, and the obligation to come!

Third, man is a being with a conscience. This is an attribute of man which clearly distinguishes him from the lower animal creation. This characteristic mark of man is involved in his rational nature. Man is a being with a conscience.

Paul declared, "I thank God, whom I serve from *my* forefathers with pure conscience" (2 Tim. 1:3). In Romans 9 it is recorded, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 9:1—ASV). In Romans 2 Paul states, "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:15). Here, we conclude as to our conscience: (1) the fact of one's conscience, (2) that the conscience is a witness bearer, (3) that the conscience commends, and (4) that the conscience condemns.

The conscience is an urger, a prompter. It urges the individual to **do** that which he judges he **ought** to do, and to **refrain** from doing that which he judges he **ought not** to do.

It is possible for one to have a good conscience, even in doing or in having done wrong. It is possible for one to have an offended conscience, even in doing or in having done right. It is an erroneous concept that the conscience can be or ought to be the guide. The real guiding factor is in the information. If the information is incomplete,

or if it is inaccurate, then the judgment may be wrong. If one acts wrongly, based upon erroneous information, doing what he had judged he ought not do, his conscience will approve his action. If one does what he judges he ought not to do, then his conscience will condemn him even if what he does is right within itself (Acts 23:1).

Fourth, man is an eternal being. In Matthew 25 it is recorded that after judgment, those on the left hand shall go away into eternal punishment; those on the right hand shall go into eternal life (Mat. 25:46).

We observe that according to Paul, “We know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). Further, he said, “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phi. 1:23). “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” (Phi. 3:21). “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:25-26). Paul refers to Christ Jesus as the one “who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). Thus:

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 (1 The. 4:16-17).

Fifth, man is a being amenable to God. The Divine Record plainly teaches, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). Repentance presupposes the fact of sin. However, sin is a transgression of divine law (1 John 3:4), and where there is no law neither is there transgression (Rom. 4:15). Where there is transgression, there is law.

Jehovah has but one body of doctrine for all men today. This body of doctrine is the gospel of Christ. It is the one faith of Ephesians 4:5. God has commanded His servants to preach this gospel to every creature in the whole world (Mark 16:15-16). Obviously, all men are

amenable to that message, the gospel, which God commands to be preached to them.

God has always reserved to Himself the right to govern man. The rulebook by which He does that governing in our day is the New Testament. It is God's will, God's law, for **all** men. It is a fact that many do not know of this amenability, and that many, knowing it, choose to disregard it. However, neither ignorance nor indifference will change the fact of its amenability.

Observe the following: All men (including non-Christians) are amenable to the Law of Christ because: (1) Sin is universal; (2) The world-wide great commission declares such; (3) The precious invitation of Christ unequivocally establishes such; (4) The basic nature of the gospel necessitates such; (5) Certain key declarations from Paul prove unequivocally such; (6) The mighty mission of the Holy Spirit offers abundant proof of such; and (7) The universal judgment positively proves that all men are amenable to the Law of Christ.

CONCLUSION

It has been our purpose to show that man was created, that he was made in the image of Deity after their likeness, and what would be the implications of this teaching. What a beautiful and encouraging statement that man was made in God's image. That man is a being with the power to think, reason, and choose. No other creature has that power!

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SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES

GENESIS 18:19

B. J. Clarke



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B. J. served as Youth and Associate Minister for the Etowah Church of Christ, Etowah, Tennessee from 1983 to 1985. In 1985, B. J. moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, to begin work as the evangelist for the Ault Road Church of Christ. He presently serves as a gospel preacher for the Southaven Church of Christ, Southaven, Mississippi.

B. J. delivered his first sermon at age 9 and has been involved in several youth rallies, gospel meetings, and lectureships. In 1985, he was selected as one of the Outstanding Young Men of America. In 1987, he held a public debate on Baptism and Apostasy. B. J. was a member of the adjunct faculty of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions from 1989 to 1990. He now serves as editor of *POWER* published by the Southaven Church of Christ and directs the annual *POWER* Lecture-ship.

INTRODUCTION

What a glad statement is recorded of Abraham in Genesis 18:19! Regarding Abraham, God said:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

What a tribute! No higher compliment could be paid to a father than what Jehovah said of Abraham. It is no exaggeration to say that the world would be revolutionized for good if each and every father would determine to imitate the qualities possessed by Abraham as a father. Abraham is often referred to (and properly so) as the father of the faithful; it is also true that Abraham was a faithful father. To fully appreciate the joy conveyed in Genesis 18:19, we wish to explore the following areas: (1) The Difficulties Of Fatherhood, (2) The Duties of Fatherhood, and (3) The Delights of Fatherhood.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF FATHERHOOD

A young father-to-be was pacing back and forth, wringing his hands in the hospital corridor while his wife was in labor. He was tied up in knots of fear and anxiety, and beads of perspiration dropping from his brow revealed the agony of his suffering. Finally, at 4:00 A.M. a nurse popped out of a door and said, "Well, sir, you have a little girl." He dropped his hands, became limp, and said, "Oh, how thankful I am that it's a girl. She'll never have to go through the awful agony I've had tonight!" I am not so sure that Mom would have appreciated hearing such a comment, but it is true, as someone has said, that if it was going to be easy to raise kids, it never would have started with something called labor. Of course, the really hard work in being a parent comes after the labor and delivery. Indeed, being a father, in the biblical sense of the term, is fraught with difficulties. It takes blood, sweat, and tears to be the kind of father God expects you to be. Moreover, fathering is a marathon, not a sprint. The Christian father must be vigilant and steadfast in training up his children in the way they should go.

The task of fatherhood is further complicated by the immoral climate of our day and time. This is clearly evident when we compare the top seven problems in school during the 1940s with the top seven problems in school in the 1990s. In the 1940s, the top seven problems were: (1) Talking in class, (2) Chewing gum, (3) Making noise, (4) Running in the halls, (5) Cutting in line, (6) Dress code violations, and (7) Littering. And what were the top seven school problems in the 1990s? Read it and weep: (1) Drug abuse, (2) Alcohol abuse, (3) Pregnancy, (4) Suicide, (5) Rape, (6) Robbery, and (7) Assault.¹ The contrast between the two lists of problems boggles the mind. Even more mind-boggling are the statistics regarding the problems of our young people. As you read the information printed upon the following pages, your heart will grieve. The problems of our youth are considerable; they are not confined to one or two small areas.

The Problems of Our Youth with Crime

Children and youths ages 12 to 20 constitute 57 percent of all serious arrests made in America. The tragic truth of the matter is that children increasingly are committing crimes ranging from armed robbery to murder, sociologists and criminal justice experts say. One in every three crimes is committed by a juvenile. "Ten years ago, it was a shock to see a 7, 8 or 9-year-old come into the system; now it's not,"

said Danny Dawson, chief of the Orange-Osceola County state attorney's juvenile division in Orlando. "It's a trend."

The Problems of Our Youth with Drugs

Five thousand American teenagers will try cocaine today for the first time. Two thousand will start using crack. And some 3.3 million American teenagers are alcoholics. And that is just the tip of the iceberg. Consider the following:

- One in every three teenagers has used an illicit drug within the past 30 days.
- Approximately 6.2 million young people age 12-17 have used marijuana at some time during their lives; 2.7 million have used marijuana in the last month; 4.8 million have used marijuana in the past year.
- One out of every 20 high school seniors (4.9%) smokes marijuana on a daily basis.
- About one in 20 seniors (5.0%) drinks alcohol daily.
- Approximately 92% of all high school seniors have used alcohol; 66% used alcohol in the last month, and 86% used it in the past year.
- Motor vehicle accidents involving alcohol are the leading cause of death for young Americans aged 15 to 19, accounting for 45% of fatalities in this age group.

The Problems of Our Young People with Sexual Permissiveness

The National Sunday School Association's Youth Survey asked 3,000 teenagers what kind of help they would like to receive from their churches. Counseling for sexual problems ranked first among twenty-one items. One out of three asked for help in this area. In a similar survey by the Lutheran Church, instruction on Christian views of sex, courtship, and marriage ranked first among forty items.

As members of the Lord's church, we must not, and cannot, stick our heads in the sand and pretend that such difficulties exist only among the denominations. While not suggesting that the statistics are identical, this author did his own informal survey and asked a number of young people *off the record* to tell me what they considered to be one of the most frequent sins committed by today's teenagers. They answered, almost uniformly, "Premarital sex."

Indeed, the sexual revolution has filtered down to teenagers with a vengeance. Nearly six out of ten sixteen-to-eighteen-year-olds admit to having had sexual intercourse. In fact, nearly half of the nation's 15 to

19-year-old girls have had premarital sex, and the age of initiation keeps dropping. Believe it or not, researchers at Indiana University surveyed 677 seventh through ninth-graders and found 55 percent admit they have had sex! By age 13, guys who have never had sex are in the minority. Girls who are virgins are in the minority by age 15.

The statistics are nothing short of staggering: American girls, on average, begin having sex at age 16, boys, at 15. By the end of their teens, 70 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys have been sexually active (*U.S. News*, 8.) Even more startling is the report that 50 percent of today's sexually active males had their first sexual experience between the ages of 11-13 (Coles, Stokes). *Parade Magazine* surveyed 303 guys and learned that by the time the average guy reaches 18, he will have had sex with five girls.

Equally frightening is the seemingly nonchalant attitude many young people have toward sexual immorality. Even during the sexual revolution of the 1960s, 85 percent of the teenagers surveyed believed that premarital sex was morally wrong. In 1981, only 21 percent felt it was wrong. With our present culture constantly bombarding our teenagers with the idea that one's sexual preferences have nothing to do with character and job performance, one can only wonder what percentage of America's youth would find premarital sex morally objectionable today.

Is it any wonder that teen-age pregnancy is epidemic, and venereal disease is rampant?

The Problems of Our Youth with Suicide

As teenagers face the tremendous pressures of living in this old wicked world, they often lack the skills to cope with difficulty and disappointment. Lacking these skills, many teenagers see suicide as an option. According to one study, 34 percent of teenagers said they "seriously considered" suicide, 32 percent said they had made plans, and 14 percent said they had made an attempt.

Another study found 20 percent of teens claimed they were "empty, confused, and would rather die than live." One survey of high school and college students asked the question: "Do you ever think suicide among young people is an option?" Forty-nine percent said "yes." A more recent study reveals that 85 percent of all adolescents think about attempting suicide, at some point. It is an epidemic of despair.

Unfortunately, many teenagers do more than just think about suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth age 15 to 19. It has tripled since 1960. It is the second leading cause of death among college students.

The Problems of Our Youth with Leaving the Church

A recent study, commissioned by a major conservative evangelical denomination, reported that within two years after graduation 96 percent of their high school students leave their denominational churches. Less than 30 percent eventually return. Within the Lord's church the statistics are not much better. The late and esteemed Guy N. Woods, who traveled the brotherhood more than any other man of his day, suggested that the Lord's church is losing 6 or 7 out of every 10 young people after they move away from home. There is obviously much work to be done.

In fact, it would be easy for some to use the moral decline of our nation as a *cop-out* for not rearing children up in the way they should go. But wait a minute—what was the moral climate at the time that God spoke the words recorded in Genesis 18:19? Remember that the context surrounding this statement has to do with the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. Although Abraham did not live within the confines of Sodom and Gomorrah, he was nonetheless prepared, whatever the climate of the world around him, to command his children to follow the ways of the Lord. Noah is another example of a father who rose to the challenge of rearing his children up in the midst of a wicked world. In fact, the wickedness of man was so great in Noah's day that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Yet, Noah set an example before his children by being "a just man *and* perfect in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). If Noah could rear righteous children in a world saturated with wickedness, and if Abraham could command his household to live righteously in the midst of an increasingly wicked world around him, then we can raise righteous children in the world today.

THE DUTIES OF FATHERHOOD

To Declare

Abraham was chosen to be a blessing to the whole earth (Gen. 12:1-3), but his impact upon the world was to begin to take effect in the simplest way. He was called to teach his own household, who again would

hand down the truth to their households. His being a blessing to the world depended first upon his being a blessing to his own home. Thus, it was important for him to declare to his family the truth of God. Abraham did this very thing when God commanded him: “Every man child among you shall be circumcised” (Gen. 17:10). After God left off talking with Abraham, he

took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him (Gen. 17:23).

Abraham wasted no time in declaring to his household what God had revealed unto him, and he led the way in faithfully carrying out God’s instructions. No wonder God could say what He did about Abraham in Genesis 18:19. The reason that God knew Abraham would command his children and his household to keep the ways of the Lord is because Abraham had proven that very thing in the past, again and again.

What about us? Will our children remember how diligent we were to declare the will of God unto them? John Flavel is credited with writing:

If you neglect to instruct your children in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness? No; if you will not teach them to pray, Satan will teach them to lie and curse. If ground is uncultivated, weeds will grow.

Of course, it is self-evident that we cannot declare the will of God unto our children if we do not possess a knowledge of that will. Therefore, it is impossible for us to educate our youth concerning the Word of God if we have not first educated ourselves. You cannot teach what you do not know! Moses exhorted the children of Israel:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deu. 6:6-9).

And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the

LORD swear unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth (Deu. 11:19-21).

It is apparent that God expected the children of Israel to educate their offspring concerning His commandments. Moreover, they were to declare these precepts *diligently*, whether they were sitting in the house, walking by the way, rising up in the morning, or lying down for the evening. People often write things upon the palms of their hands to remind them of something they deem to be important, or they post a note on the front door or the mirror where the message will be seen, and not forgotten. In a similar way, we must teach our children the will of God so diligently that it will be as prominently impressed upon their hearts as a message on a neon sign or as permanently inscribed as indelible ink!

The Psalmist echoed the same emphasis regarding the spiritual education of our children. He speaks of the will of God:

Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know *them*, *even* the children *which* should be born; *who* should arise and declare *them* to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (Psa. 78:3-7).

Our view of religion and theology is vitally connected with what “our fathers have told us.” As parents, we must not hide the truth from our children, but rather, we must make it known to our children that the generation to come might arise and declare them to their children. The father is to make known the truth of God to his children (Isa. 38:19). Parents must pass the knowledge of God down to their children as a precious family heirloom. This is precisely what occurred with Lois, Eunice, and Timothy. Grandmother Lois passed her sincere faith down to mother Eunice, and they jointly transmitted such to Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5). They made certain that from a child, Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15).

After crossing the Jordan River, a monument, consisting of 12 stones, was erected to memorialize the event. Joshua told the people

that when your children ask *their fathers* in time to come, saying, What *mean* ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, that the

waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever (Jos. 4:6-7).

Modern day fathers have no less responsibility to educate their children concerning all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). When our children ask what the Lord's Supper means, we ought to be able to tell them the Bible answer (1 Pet. 3:15). Likewise, when they ask why we do not use mechanical instruments of music, we should be able to show them the truth. We must not assume that our children will learn all they need to know about the Bible in their Sunday school class or Wednesday night Bible study. We must impress upon our children the fact that we consider their knowledge of God's Word to be the most important and valuable knowledge they can accumulate in this life. What impression is left with our children when we make certain they have their books with them before they leave the house for public school but fail to see to it that they have their Bibles with them before they go to Bible class? Moreover, what impression is received by our children when we expect them to do their homework for public school but never encourage them to prepare their lessons for Bible class?

Not only is it important that we declare God's will to our children, it is important that we do it **early**! This writer read the story of two heads made of metal, lying side by side in a sculptor's workshop. One was perfect. All the features of a manly, noble face were clear and distinct. The other, however, had scarcely a single, recognizable human characteristic. It was marred and spoiled. The sculptor explained: "This one is badly distorted because the metal was allowed to cool before it was stamped out, and therefore it wouldn't take the impression." The application is clear: many souls might have been stamped with the likeness of the Savior while they were still warm with the glow of early youth, but they were allowed to become cold. Thus, they were misinformed and their lives ruined.

*Ere a child has reached to seven
Teach him all the way to heaven;
Better still the work will thrive
If he learns before he's five.*

Hence, we must declare the will of God unto our children, early and often!

To Demonstrate

Abraham did not merely declare the will of God unto his household. He demonstrated his own obedience to God's will. On the very same day that he instructed his son and household to be circumcised, he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin (Gen. 17:24-26). He did not declare one thing to his family only to turn around and do the opposite. His persistent demonstration of obedience to the commands of God, no doubt, left an indelible impression upon the hearts of his children. Do you suppose Isaac ever forgot how his father obeyed the commandment from God to sacrifice him as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:1-14)? God knew that Abraham would declare His will with his lips, and demonstrate it by his life.

Likewise, the religion of a child depends on what its mother and father **are**, and not on what they **say**. It is important to observe that we educate our children, not only by what we say, but also by what we do. In fact, what we **do** before our children speaks even louder to them than what we say. Actions do speak louder than words! Our children are watching our lives carefully. A little boy was playing with a toy car when his mother heard him let out a string of profanity. She reprimanded him and asked, "Where did you learn those awful words?" The boy replied, "From Daddy. That's what he says when he can't get his car going."

Sometimes we are so quick to label today's young people as delinquent that we forget to analyze what factors have contributed to their delinquency. The following poem, entitled *The Real Delinquents*, gives adults something to think about:

We read in the papers, we hear on the air,
Of killing and stealing, and crime everywhere.
We sigh, and we say, as we notice the trend,
"This young generation! Where will it all end?"
But can we be sure that it's their fault alone?
That maybe most of it isn't really our own?
Too much money to spend, too much idle time;
Too many movies of passion and crime;
Too many books not fit to be read;
Too much of evil in what they hear said;
Too many children encouraged to roam,
By too many parents who won't stay at home.
Kids don't make the movies, they don't write the books,
They paint a gay picture of gangsters and crooks.

They don't make the liquor, they don't run the bars,
They don't pass the laws, nor make the high-speed cars.
They don't make the drugs that addle the brain;
It's all done by older folks greedy for gain.
Thus in so many cases it must be confessed,
The label "Delinquent" fits older folks best.

The best father is the one who practices what he teaches. If we tell our children that worshipping God is important, then we had better demonstrate an unwavering commitment to attend the worship services. Recent in-depth studies indicate that the single most important factor in young people remaining faithful to the Lord's church revolves around the immediate family and its faithfulness in attendance and supporting the work of the church. Where both parents are faithful to the Lord, meaning that the parents not only attend regularly but also participate actively in the work of the congregation, 93 percent of the kids remained faithful. If only one of the parents were faithful the figure dropped to 73 percent. In homes where only one of the parents attends, and is only mildly active in the work of the church, only 53 percent of the children stay faithful. Finally, and most disturbing of all, in cases where both parents attend only infrequently, the percentage of their children who remained faithful plummeted to a woeful 6 percent.

Therefore, the solution for our problem with losing young people to apostasy is not dependent upon more youth programs, activities, and rallies. Rather, the best way to make sure that our children go to heaven is by our leading the way. A word of caution is in order. Even if we attend all of the services, and fail to put into practice what we have learned, our children will not be fooled. A young boy was riding along in the automobile with his father. He looked up at his father and asked, "Daddy, what's a Christian?" His father, familiar with the Bible definition of a Christian, gave his son a detailed answer. Convinced that he had provided a superb answer, the father looked to his son for a nod of approval. However, his son's next question pierced his heart with searing pain. After hearing the description of a Christian, he looked up and asked, "Daddy, have I ever seen one?" Apparently, his father knew the definition in his head, but did not live it out in his heart.

Our children will not be impressed by our knowledge of the Bible if it is not coupled with a life of devotion to God. We must "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things" (Tit. 2:10). A child is not

likely to find a Father in God unless he finds something of God in his father.

Fathers need to demonstrate the value of the soul above all else.

Too many fathers are communicating a materialistic value system to their children. Some are so anxious to give their children what they did not have that they have neglected to give them what they had. *Newsweek* magazine for April 3, 1989, reported the response of baseball's great Pete Rose to an article in *Gentleman's Quarterly* in which two of his children said Rose was not a good father. "I'm a great father," Rose said. "I bought my daughter a new Mercedes-Benz last week." If that is the measure of fatherhood, most of us have failed miserably.

Several years ago, I approached a delinquent member about returning to services. Knowing that he had recently become a father, I congratulated him and pointed out that this was a perfect time for him to get back in church. He looked at me quizzically and asked why? I replied that it was the perfect time because his newborn child would need the example of a Christian father. He looked me straight in the face and responded: "As long as I provide for my children's physical needs, I will have fulfilled my obligations as a father." It is hard to believe that a man could make such a statement. Nothing could be further from the truth. Socrates (470-399 B.C.) wrote:

Could I climb to the highest place in Athens, I would lift my voice and proclaim: "Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth, and take so little care of your children to whom one day you must relinquish it all?"

If we would be the kind of father Abraham was, we must demonstrate for our children the way they ought to go. A man and his young son were climbing a mountain. They came to a place where the climbing was difficult and even dangerous. The father stopped to consider which way he should go. He heard the boy behind him say, "Choose the good path, Dad; I'm coming right behind you!" If our children follow the same spiritual path we are traveling, where will they spend eternity?

To Discipline

Although we do not have a specific text wherein we see Abraham practicing discipline toward his children, it is absolutely implied in the statement made by God in Genesis 18:19. After all, God knew, and taught in other places, that a part of influencing your children to go in

the right way requires the practice of discipline. Contrast Eli as a father with Abraham as a father. Whereas God was confident that Abraham would command his household to know Him and His ways, “the sons of Eli *were* sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD (1 Sam. 2:12). His sons were so wicked that they “lay with the women that assembled *at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (1 Sam. 2:22). Eli confronted his sons about their sins—but it was too late. Why did his sons turn out the way that they did? Why did they make themselves vile? The Bible gives the answer: “he restrained them not” (1 Sam. 3:13).

Our world is reaping the harvest of years and years of a permissive parenting philosophy. Even some psychologists are beginning to see the light. At a psychologist’s conference many years ago, one of the keynote speakers said, “the greatest social disaster of this century is the belief that abundant love makes discipline unnecessary.” Someone else has observed that “the behavior of some children suggests that their parents embarked on the sea of matrimony without a paddle.”

Love and correction are not mutually exclusive. The Lord corrects those whom He loves (Pro. 3:11-12). Refraining from physical discipline is not proof of one’s love; it proves just the opposite (Pro. 13:24). The practice of discipline is urgent. We must not allow the tears of our children to keep us from doing what needs to be done for their benefit (Pro. 19:18). *All* children exhibit certain types of foolish behavior and physical punishment is sometimes necessary to eliminate it (Pro. 22:15). Someone has aptly observed that many parents are discovering that a pat on the back helps develop character...if given often, early, and low enough. One man reflected back on his childhood and said, “When my father found me on the wrong track, he always provided switching facilities.” A measured dose of physical discipline will not kill our children, but it may save their souls from a death far worse (Pro. 23:13-14; Rev. 21:8). Some parents should be more accurately labeled as *sparents*. What do we mean?

*“Sparents” are those who spare the rod
When offspring need attention;
They find their troubles multiplied
In ways too sad to mention*

Benjamin Franklin wrote, “*Let thy child’s first lesson be obedience, and the second will be what thou wilt.*” If our children do not learn to

respect the authority of an earthly father, how will they ever learn to respect the authority of the Heavenly Father? One of the hardest jobs for a parent is making a child realize that “no” is a complete sentence. We must not hesitate to teach our children that we love them too much to let them behave in a manner detrimental to their eternal welfare. The parent must convince himself that discipline is not something he does to the child; it is something he does for the child. The proper attitude toward a child’s disobedience is this: “I love you too much to let you behave like that.” In disciplining our children we want to aim for a loving, but firm, balance. Rearing kids is like holding a wet bar of soap—too firm a grasp and it shoots from your hand, too loose a grasp and it slides away. A gentle but firm grasp keeps it in your control.

To Devote

Good fathers must devote their time to participating in the lives of their children. America is suffering from an epidemic of absentee fathers. Consider the following statistics:

- Percentage of American children living with father and mother, in 1960: 80.6
- Percentage living with both parents in 1994: 57.7
- Percentage of U.S. children living apart from their biological fathers in 1960: 17.
- Percentage of U.S. children living apart from their biological fathers in 1990: 36.
- Percentage of teenagers who spend less than 30 minutes a week talking with their fathers about things that really matter to them: 66

It is pathetic that some fathers can recount their family tree back several generations, but cannot tell where their children were even last night. Our society has so many latch-key kids that one comedian mused that the reason so many children are found on the streets at night is that they do not want to be left at home by themselves. What father, who has heard the song, has not been haunted by the words to the song *Cat’s In The Cradle*? The song is about a father who is always promising to spend time with his son, only to find that when he is finally ready to do so, his son has grown up and has no time for him.

The value of time spent together should not be underestimated. Charles Francis Adams was a 19th century political diplomat. One of his diary entries read, “Went fishing with my son today—a day wasted.” His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary. His entry, for that

same day, is, “Went fishing with my father today—the most wonderful day of my life.” We need to spend time with our children, helping them to deal with their personal problems in life. This takes time, listening, advising, and assisting when needed.

Unfortunately, the home has become a filling station where members of the family pop in and pop out. Very few families know the joy of dining together as a family. Studies show there is more happening at family meal times than just eating. A recent study shows that high school students who interact with their families at dinner are more likely to spend time studying, on part-time employment, and participating in athletics. “A family that eats dinner together is doing a lot more than eating.” said Paul Krouse, publisher of *Who’s Who Among American High School Students*. The survey also showed:

- Students who never eat dinner together with their families are three times less likely to have a happy and close home life than those who regularly eat dinner with family.
- High School students who rarely or never eat dinner together with their families are almost four times as likely to have engaged in sexual intercourse (67%) than those who regularly eat dinner as a family (17%) (*Washington Times*).

Tragically, television often wields more influence over our youth than fathers do. Academy Award winning composer Al Kasha said, “MTV is a very destructive force in society primarily because, for many, it plays a surrogate parental role. MTV is raising a generation of young people.”

The value of taking the time to listen to our children is well expressed in the following lines:

*Take a moment to listen today
To what your children are trying to say;
Listen today, whatever you do
Or they won't be there to listen to you.
Listen to their problems, listen for their needs,
Praise their smallest triumphs, praise their smallest deeds;
Tolerate their chatter, amplify their laughter,
Find out what's the matter, find out what they're after.
But tell them that you love them, every single night
And though you scold them, be sure you hold them;
Tell them, "Everything's all right; Tomorrow's looking bright!"
Take a moment to listen today
To what your children are trying to say;
Listen today, whatever you do*

And they will come back to listen to you.

THE DELIGHTS OF FATHERHOOD

I will never forget the feeling of joy which surged through me when I held our firstborn child for the very first time. But, then I think about Abraham. He waited, and waited, and waited some more, before he knew the joy of holding the son of promise, Isaac, in his arms. Upon hearing that Isaac would indeed be born, Abraham laughed with joy at the thought of a man his age finally realizing the promise (Gen. 17:17). Any father can relate to the joyous statement of the psalmist, who wrote:

Lo, children *are* an heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is his* reward. As arrows *are* in the hand of a mighty man; so *are* children of the youth. Happy *is* the man that hath his quiver full of them (Psa. 127:3-5).

As marvelous as it is to see your own children enter into the world, that is not the greatest delight of fatherhood. The greatest delight of a father is when he sees his children “keep the way of the LORD” (Gen. 18:19). As the Proverbs writer put it: “A wise son maketh a glad father” (Pro. 10:1; 15:20). “The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise *child* shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice” (Pro. 23:24-25).

As I gazed down in amazement at our firstborn son, the responsibility of bringing a soul into the world hit me with brute force. I kept thinking over and over in my mind of how the eternal destiny of his precious soul would depend largely upon my performance as a parent. I had never been entrusted with something so valuable. If I had been appointed as the steward over the wealth of a billionaire, I would have been required to account for every cent. Yet, I had just become the steward of something infinitely more valuable than a billion dollars multiplied by infinity. No wonder I cried tears of joy when my two oldest children were born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). There is a sense in which our children are the only possessions we can take to heaven. Therefore, we must be as diligent as Abraham in making sure that we command them to know the way of the Lord.

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ENDNOTE

¹Unless otherwise specified, all statistics and illustrations used in this chapter from *Bible Illustrator for Windows*, a computer software program (Hiawatha, IA: Parsons Software, Inc.).

“AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE”

JOSHUA 24:15

Stanley Ryan



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INTRODUCTION

The theme of this year's lectureship is timely: *Encouraging Statements Of The Bible*. When so many negative things are going on round about us in the world and the brotherhood, we should remember the Lord stated to Joshua: "I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage" (Jos. 1:5-6). Each one of us must courageously trust in God. We need Christian homes standing for moral purity. The church must continue to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). A lost world needs the gospel (Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 1:16). Every member needs encouragement, and we are to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb. 10:24). We need to encourage, strengthen, edify one another, and serve the Lord. Joshua's statement certainly ought to get our attention: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Jos. 24:15). These words encouraged an entire nation to be spiritually revived: "And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua" (Jos. 24:31).

JOSHUA CHALLENGED ALL THE PEOPLE

These are the words of Joshua as he issues a solemn charge and challenge to all the tribes of Israel:

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers 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 flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Jos. 24:14-15).

He calls for a genuine reverence for God out of a free and willing allegiance of the heart and the rejection of all idolatry.

Joshua proclaimed his choice and, in so doing, set an example of spiritual leadership for his family and for the nation of Israel. Joshua insisted that they make an immediate decision: "choose you this day whom ye will serve" and warned them of the consequences of forsaking the Lord (vv. 19-20). The people accepted the challenge and also committed themselves to serve the Lord. "And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD" (v. 21), and then in verse 24: "And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." We need spiritual leaders today who will set the proper example in the home, in the church, and in our country. We must warn people of the negative consequences of forsaking the Lord. We must insist that people serve the Lord and obey His voice as revealed in the written Word.

JOSHUA WAS THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF HIS HOUSE

The fact that Joshua was head of his house or family is understood from his statement: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." He ably declares his decision and the course of his entire family. He is their example, teacher, counselor, leader, caretaker, and provider. God ordained the male leadership role in the beginning, and it continued through the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian ages. Man was created first and woman was made to be his "help meet" (Gen. 2:18-25). God stated, "Thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16). Jesus refers to the creation order: "Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female" (Mat. 19:4). Paul instructed the Corinthians: "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:8-9). To the Ephesians Paul wrote, "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” (Eph. 5:22-23; Col. 3:18). Peter wrote, “Likewise, ye wives, *be* in subjection to your own husbands” (1 Pet. 3:1). The leadership role of the male is based on the creation order—not culture. The roles as designed by God indicate organization and do not imply that females are *inferior* or someone of *less value* as some claim. Paul affirms the spiritual value and equality of every believer in Galatians 3:26-28 while maintaining the uniqueness of organizational roles in other passages. Man is to be the head without being a tyrant, and he is to have dominion without being domineering. Many times today modern social life has either demoted man, or he has abdicated his God-given role in the family. We need more men like Joshua to give spiritual direction in the home and in the community.

Some of the militant women’s organizations resent the use of *man* and *woman* or *male* and *female*. However, those are biblical terms designating the way God made them (Mat. 19:4; Gen. 1:27). The *unisex* language required by some is a direct assault against the Word of God. We have seen an abundance of efforts to make the man to be effeminate, and the woman to be more manly. However, Paul condemns such changes in roles in Romans 1, and identifies effeminates in the catalogue of sins listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9.

We need to remind and awaken the world, family counselors, religious leaders, and the church in general, to the importance of marriage. God used marriage to illustrate the pure and holy relationship He desired with His people. God is spoken of as a husband to Israel (Jer. 31:32; Hos. 2:16; 2:20; Isa. 54:5-6). In the New Testament, Christ is portrayed as the groom (John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7, 9; 21:2, 9). Israel is pictured as Jehovah’s wife in the Old Testament (Jer. 3:20; Eze. 16:8-14; Hos. 1:2). In the New Testament the church is pictured five times as the bride of Christ (Rev. 22:17; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-33; Rom. 7:1-4; John 3:29). Then, in Revelation 19:7 and Revelation 21:9, we read of the eternally redeemed as being the wife of the Lamb.

WE WILL SERVE THE LORD IN OUR HOMES

Husbands, wives, and children must live for the Lord daily (Luke 9:23). The home must be filled with love and respect for each other and God (1 Cor. 13). “Husbands, love your wives” (Eph. 5:22-27). Wives are: “to love their husbands, to love their children” (Tit. 2:3-6).

Children are to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph. 6:1). Every successful home must practice the "golden rule" to maintain courtesy, selflessness, and morals (Mat. 7:12). This will also prevent abuse and neglect. We are to seek happiness in our marriage (Pro. 5:18). We are to recognize "a good *thing*" (Pro. 18:22). We are to estimate the value of a godly mate (Pro. 31:10, 28). We must honor one another as heirs of God (1 Pet. 3:7). We must learn to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves (Mat. 22:37-40).

We are to study God's Word and teach it to our children daily (Deu. 4:5-10; 6:6-9; 2 Tim. 2:15). From childhood they are to know the holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15). We are to train our children (Pro. 22:6). We are to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). We must pray and teach our children to pray (Mat. 6:9-15; 1 The. 5:17). We must faithfully attend all services and instruct them in scriptural avenues of worship (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 11; Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:7). We must teach our children the joy of evangelism (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). We must teach our children compassion for the needy (Gal. 6:10; Jam. 1:27). We must teach our children the nondenominational nature of the church (Mat. 16:18; Acts 2:47, 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:1-7). We must teach our children to prove all things and to abstain from sin and the evils of the world (1 The. 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15-17). We must teach our children that God loves them (John 3:16), and that Jesus died to redeem them (Eph. 1:7). That as they penitently and prayerfully walk in the light Christ's blood keeps on cleansing them (1 John 1:7-9). We must teach them to be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10). We must teach them of the hope of heaven and the doom of hell (Rev. 21:3-5; 20:12-15).

WE WILL SERVE THE LORD WHEN AT WORK

Think of the many hours each day (8, 10, 12, 14, 16) and each week (40, 60, 80) that you spend at work. Christianity does not end when we clock in. Christianity is a way of life that includes our work. From creation God had ordained that man should dress and keep the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). When man was cast out of the garden, he was instructed to work and to eat bread in the sweat of his face (Gen. 3:19). Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain tilled the ground. Paul in writing to Christians said, "Rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth"

(Eph. 4:28). To the Thessalonians Paul rebuked the disorderly conduct of some who would not work and stated, “If any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 The. 3:10). Paul described the family responsibility to provide: “If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8). A Christian learns contentment with the necessities of life: “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Tim. 6:8). We are to be content with such things as we have (Heb. 13:5). Covetousness and the love of money is not to control the Christian (1 Tim. 6:9-10). Christians must realize they are to be faithful stewards, using their prosperity to the glory of God (Luke 12:42). A Christian contributes to the work of the church to support evangelism, benevolence, and edification “as *God* hath prospered him” (1 Cor. 16:2). Christianity on the job should demonstrate faith in God, contentment, honesty, truthfulness, and submission. It will provide opportunities to have a positive influence on the boss and our fellow workers. Many souls have been saved as the result of sowing the seed while working.

WE WILL SERVE THE LORD IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Every Christian must realize their influence in the local community is vitally important. It was said of the Jerusalem church: “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). They did not compromise in evangelism, benevolence, edification, worship, or Christian living. Those brethren did the work of the church as the church.

People in the community where we live judge the church by the lives of the individual members they know. We must “give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Tim. 5:14). We must let our Christian light (Mat. 5:14-16) shine all around our neighborhoods. We must practice our religion (Jam. 1:27) and live our faith as Jesus and the apostles did in their home town or into whatever community they traveled (Mat. 2:23; Luke 4:16; Mat. 10:5-11; Acts 1:1; Rom. 2:21). We cannot afford hypocrisy in our lives to become a stumbling block that will bring shame and reproach against the church (Psa. 1:1; Mat. 23:13). We realize we are in the world, but not of the world (John 17:14-16). Our affections are to be on “things above” and not on the world or “on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2; 1 John 3:15-16).

We understand that we would have to go out of the world to escape evil. However, the church must be purged of evil (1 Cor. 5:7, 10). Every member is encouraged to remain penitent and prayerful. We know that through faith in Christ we have overcome the world and the wicked one (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 2:11-12; 1 John 2:14). We are not ignorant of Satan's devices to entangle us again (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Pet. 5:8).

The community needs to see our real qualities. We are to "adorn the doctrine of God" (Tit. 2:10; 1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3-5; Rev. 21:2). When the heart, mind, and soul are properly equipped, it will affect the outward manifestation. They need to see Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20). They need to know we love God and our neighbor (Mat. 22:36-39). We must show ourselves friendly (Pro. 18:24). We must demonstrate our citizenship. We need to participate in projects that will improve and beautify our community. Many things that do not have a primary spiritual connection can become a spiritual opportunity. A trip to the barber shop can become an evangelistic opportunity to pass out tracts or a church bulletin. Attendance at a Parent Teacher Association meeting can be an opportunity to invite people to a gospel meeting. Support of a volunteer fire department can become an opportunity to illustrate the dangers of hell fire. Because most people look on the outward things first, we are aware of the importance of a clean well-kept yard and homes that are properly maintained. Most in the world believe "cleanliness is next to godliness." More than once I have heard people ridicule the church because the church yard or the preacher's yard was not well kept. We must go the second mile with our neighbor to avoid petty controversies (Mat. 5:38-48; Rom. 12: 19-21). We are to live peacefully if at all possible. We are to maintain peace and harmony in our families (1 Tim. 2:2; Pro. 17:1). Fussing, fighting, temper tantrums, and domestic violence among family members renders a vicious blow against the cause of Christ (Tit. 2:8; Eph. 4:29). We must raise our children to demonstrate respect for people and property, as well as courtesy, honesty, kindness, and quietness (Pro. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; Tit. 2:2-10). We must avoid neighborhood gossip (1 Tim. 5:13).

From time to time situations arise wherein special doors of opportunities are opened (Gal. 6:10). At times of extended illnesses families appreciate prayers, cards, food, and visits. When there are deaths and funerals, our sympathy and concern can be shown in many

ways. At showers and weddings, we can share our love with cards, tracts, and books that will give spiritual guidance. When there are fires, floods, tornadoes, and earthquakes, we can give money, food, clothing, household goods, and Bibles. We can help clean up or furnish a place to stay. When there are needy widows or orphan children neglected, abused, or abandoned, we can help (Gal. 6:2). When there are new babies, birthdays, anniversaries, and graduations, we have the opportunity to rejoice and give spiritual gifts to remind people of the goodness of God (Jam. 1:17). When new families move into our community, we can welcome them and make them familiar with the church.

We are to respect civil government and be law-abiding citizens (Rom. 13:1-7). Now, as much as ever, we need to elect leaders who respect the will of God. We need to pray for our leaders: “For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:2). Paul used his citizenship to overcome the evil intent of men and in God’s providence to carry the gospel to Rome (Acts 25:11; 28:30-31).

WE WILL SERVE THE LORD IN THE CHURCH

Membership in the local church is essential. Jesus had promised, “I will build my church” (Mat.16:18). He would build it and it would belong to Him. It would consist of those who believed in Him and served Him “as the Christ, the Son of God.” “Church” is from the Greek word *ekklesia* and means “the called out.” Thus, the church is that body of people who have been called out of the world by the gospel and by gospel obedience have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ (2 The. 2:14; Rom. 1:16, 2 The. 1:7-9; Eph. 1:7). Christ rules as the singular head of the church (Col. 1:18), and as members we serve to bring glory to God (Eph. 3:21). When we define *church*, we are simply referring to those who have been saved. Notice Acts 2:47: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” That day about 3,000 gladly received the Word and were baptized (v. 41). The 3,000 that were saved were also added to the church. All those saved were members of the local congregation in Jerusalem. There were no saved people outside the church in Jerusalem. As the number of saved people grew, so did the number of church members. We are informed that on one occasion the number that “believed [was] about five thousand” (Acts 4:4), and on another that the “number of the disciples was multiplied” (Acts 6:1). There was a great “persecution

against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad" (Acts 8:1). Mission work began as local congregations were established in various cities as the saved carried the gospel and taught the lost (Acts 8:4). When the lost were saved, they were added to the church. They could not become saved without becoming members of the church. This makes it clear that the requirements of salvation and the requirements of church membership are the same. By *local church* we refer to the congregation meeting in a certain location or town: Jerusalem, Samaria, Damascus, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, and other places. By local membership we refer to the location where a person lives and thus discharges his duty, responsibilities, and Christian obligations in life and worship. Every faithful Christian in the first century was an active member of a local congregation.

WE ARE OPPOSED TO DENOMINATIONALISM

Most denominational preachers say, "One does not have to be a member of any church to be saved." We need to remember, they are using *church* to refer to a man-made denomination. He is right in that salvation is not in a denomination. One denomination is as good as another denomination because neither is authorized by God. This is quite different from the Bible's definition of *church*. Why do religious people unscripturally define *church* to mean a denomination? They do this in an attempt to justify their religious division. It comforts them to think that "one denomination is as good as another." This is the result of protesting against the universal claim of authority over all religion made by the Roman Catholic Church (the apostate state-run church which once used a powerful army to enforce its binding religious traditions). We affirm that they were justified in protesting against the apostasy of Roman Catholicism. However, reformation is insufficient if it does not result in the restoration of pure, New Testament Christianity. Protestants can make no biblical defense to justify the hundreds of unscriptural denominations that exist. They are apostates themselves and find themselves straddling the fence on the issue of unity and oneness as taught in the New Testament (John 17, 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-7). Ecumenism, is an effort to gloss over differences in favor of union in matters of common agreement. Those who oppose doctrinal unity as taught by Jesus in favor of "unity in diversity" must be rebuked (Mat. 15:9; Rom. 16:17). The ecumenical movement does not correct doctrinal error but rather harbors it. The denominational theory

erroneously supposes the true church does not and cannot exist today. The principal of restoration is idealistic to them. The idea of a pattern is foreign to their desire for religious freedom. Some are honestly mistaken and can be taught; others want to be popular at all cost. Their goal is to be large; so they are people pleasers and crowd oriented (2 Tim. 3:4; Tit. 3:3; Exo. 23:2).

Some today use *non-denominationalism* to mean inter-denominational fellowship. *Denomination* implies that the group referred to is but one member of a larger group, called or denominated by a particular name. The basic contention of the denominational theory of the church is that the true church is not to be identified in any exclusive sense with any particular ecclesiastical institution. No denomination claims to represent the whole church. The denominational theory of the church was implicit in the thinking of the Protestant Reformers. The true church, they affirm, "is not an institution, although in the life of the world it must assume institutional form." Some refer to a *visible* and *invisible church*. Protestantism once majored in protesting against the corruption of Roman Catholicism. However, now some have so mellowed as to offer fellowship during holy days and joint community services. Statistics show that traditional denominationalism is on the decline. Many denominations are having non-traditional services in an effort to hold members or to attract new ones. Modern denomination-alism is the result of a failed effort to reform Roman Catholicism. Through the years many have thrown off the shackles of idolatry, unbelief, Catholicism, protestant denominationalism, and worldliness to wholeheartedly commit themselves to the restoration of New Testament Christianity. It saddens this author deeply to recognize that some who once stood for the truth have, like Demas, forsaken truth for the popularity of the world (2 Tim. 4:10).

WE WILL STAND UPON THE WORD OF GOD

Faithful brethren throughout the world are pleading for the restoration of the original Christianity of the New Testament. Let us go back to the Bible, follow the pattern that is there, and be what they were. They were Christians and members of the church Christ built (Rom. 16:16). To restore first century Christianity we must go back beyond the Protestant movement, beyond the corruption of Roman Catholicism to the Bible. Any person who carefully reads the New Testament and then examines the Protestant/Catholic *versions* will be

struck by the difference between the original and modern varieties. Every aspect of primitive Christianity has suffered from attempts of men to change it to their liking.

The form of church organization has been changed from simple congregational oversight by local elders, served by deacons (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1; Phi. 1:1) to a complex pyramid government, one-man pastor system, board of deacons, presidents, conventions delegates, and earthly headquarters.

The names by which the church and its members were known has been changed to denominational names such as Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, etc. Let us be Christians (Acts 11:26), members of the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16).

The terms of salvation have been changed to "faith only," "wholly of grace," "altar calls," "sinners prayers," and "receiving Jesus into your heart." Let us restore gospel preaching, faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins (Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16, Mat. 10:32-33; Acts 2:38). The recipients and form of baptism has been changed from believing adults to infants and from burial by immersion to pouring and sprinkling. Let us restore the Bible pattern (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12).

The doctrine has been changed to the traditions of men (Mat. 15:9) and doctrines of devils (1 Tim. 4:1). Let us restore the doctrine of Christ and the apostles' teaching as revealed in the Bible (Acts 2:42; John 12:48; Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9-10).

The form of worship has suffered from professional entertainers and performers with jokes, tales, gimmicks, and all kinds of additions and subtractions. Let us restore sincere, fervent prayer, congregational acappella singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), weekly communion (Acts 20:7), a free will offering only on Sunday (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and simple gospel preaching which presents the whole counsel of God (Rom. 1:16; Acts 20:20-27).

The unity of the one body (Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18) has been overshadowed by the multiplication of competing religious bodies (denominations). These and other changes have robbed believers of a clear vision of what Christianity was originally like. Let us restore first century unity.

A FAREWELL CHALLENGE TO YOU

For a moment, look out into the world at the cold, harsh, immoral, ungodly, and abusive society that we live in: where lying, stealing, rape, homosexuality, and murder abounds. Look at our religious world of temples, cathedrals, mega-churches, cults, faith healers, snake handlers, denominations, and money hungry entertainers. These blind spiritual leaders are leading multitudes in the broad way to destruction. Have you chosen to go with them?

Now look at what the Bible offers: a God who is worthy to be praised for His great love, a spiritual Father that is merciful and kind, a Savior who died to redeem you, a golden rule that is fair to all, a pattern for marriage to promote morality, righteous spiritual values for everyday living, a religion where God is praised and man is edified, a church that uplifts the cross and calls on its members to worship in spirit and truth, a Savior who leads the faithful in the straight and narrow way, and an invitation to the helpless that they may find hope in the blood of the lamb. What is your choice? “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

GOD'S SUPERIORITY

1 SAMUEL 5:1-4

Daniel Denham



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INTRODUCTION

The Bible affirms the superiority of Jehovah over everyone and everything that would be called “God.” It is important for faith in God to be founded upon adequate evidence (Rom. 10:17; 1 The. 5:21-22). The Bible, confirmed by internal and external evidence to be the very “word of God,” provides a sufficient record of God’s dealings with men to establish His own credibility for faith in Him. He is the omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent Sovereign of the universe. No text more strikingly emphasizes this great lesson than does 1 Samuel 5:1-4.

The text reads as follows:

And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon *was* fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon *was* fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands *were* cut off upon the threshold; only *the stump* of Dagon was left to him.

First Samuel 4 closes with the horrific news that “the ark of God,” also called “the ark of the covenant,” had been lost in battle by the

Hebrews to the Philistines. Our lesson finds its foundation in the events of this chapter. Let us now observe Israel's defeat.

ISRAEL'S DEFEAT

Israel had gathered its forces against their archenemies and had pitched camp beside Ebenezer, while the Philistines massed at Aphek, which lay on the western border of Ephraim near Philistia where the Shephelah meets the plain of Sharon (Turner, 216). Aphek was a key fortress, as its name intimates, that provided the Philistines an advanced staging area for incursions into Israelite territory (Turner, 217). The two forces collided at Aphek in an engagement that led to a Philistine victory and the slaughter of "about four thousand men" among the Israelites (1 Sam. 4:1-2).

Upon news of the initial defeat, "the elders of Israel" sent to Shiloh to have the ark of God brought out to spur the Israelite troops to renew the battle and drive out the Philistine oppressors (1 Sam. 4:3). They resorted to an unprecedented use of the ark to strike fear in the hearts of their enemies, and seem to take no thought that it was God who had given the battle to the Philistines. As Edersheim observes, they

unhesitatingly ascribed the disaster not to secondary causes [i.e. their sin], but to the direct agency of Jehovah (4:18).

He adds:

It was quite in accordance with the prevailing religious state that, instead of inquiring into the causes of God's controversy with them, they sought safety in having among them "the ark of the covenant of the Lord," irrespective of the Lord Himself and of the terms of His covenant (4:18).

Samuel had earlier prophesied of the destruction of the house of Eli (1 Sam. 3:10-14). The defeat of Israel had been by God's design. The Israelites superstitiously thought that the presence of God would be with them if only they bore the ark into battle and that such would insure victory!

The ark's appearance in the camp of Israel immediately encouraged the Hebrews and terrified the Philistines, who knew of the great victories Jehovah God had wrought against the powerful Egyptians a few centuries before at the time of the Exodus (1 Sam. 4:4-8). First Samuel 4:9 refers to a speech of exhortation that evidently strengthened the resolve of the Philistines and kept them from bolting from the field of battle at the sight of the ark. The result of the major battle that

followed was tragic for Israel (1 Sam 4:10-11). Her forces were routed, thirty thousand footmen being slain. The ark was seized by the victors and carted off to Ashdod. Hophni and Phinehas, the rebellious sons of the priest Eli, were slain. They had played a central part in bringing about this dreadful state of affairs through their dishonesty, licentiousness, and greed (cf., 1 Sam. 2). Eli himself died upon hearing the news of the deaths of his sons and the loss of the ark. Being of great age, at the news he fell over from where he was sitting and broke his neck (cf., 1 Sam. 4:12-22).

Shortly, news of these things reached the house of Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas. She was "with child" and was nearing the time of delivery. When she heard the tidings of the loss of the ark and the deaths of her husband and aged father-in-law, "she bowed herself and travailed." Her labor pains came upon her. The great stress and sorrow of the moment overwhelmed her so that she died shortly after the birth of a son. In dying, she called him "Ichabod," meaning "no glory": for "The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband" (1 Sam. 4:19-21). "And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken" (v. 22). Even the joy of the birth of her child could not assuage the tremendous sorrow of the occasion brought on by the reckless and rebellious behavior of her own husband and those associated with him. A dark day had come to Israel, but in the midst of the darkness the radiance of God's superiority would shine through and lead inexorably to a greater victory led by Samuel on the same field of battle a few years later in 1 Samuel 7, which victory Samuel would commemorate by the stone of Ebenezer, which itself means "stone of the help" (Ewing, 2:890).

Many of our wounds are "self-inflicted." Israel's defeat arose from a lack of trust in God and the toleration of corrupt leaders, like Hophni and Phinehas, who were "sons of Belial" and who "knew not the LORD" (1 Sam. 2:12). Like Israel in the days of Isaiah, the leaders caused the people to err (Isa. 3:12). God's holiness and righteousness could not let this pass (Hab. 1:13).

The ark of the covenant passed into the unclean hands of the Gentiles. The most precious piece of furniture in ancient Israel became the prize trophy of the Philistines, of whom even the Egyptians held a grudging respect for their military prowess. The ark was the center-

piece in the tabernacle or “tent of meeting,” the place of worship in Israel until the time of its successor, the temple of God at Jerusalem. The tabernacle was located at Shiloh at the time of the defeat in 1 Samuel 4. A little while later, due to the collapse of Israel’s forces, Shiloh would be overrun and destroyed by a Philistine incursion. The devastation wrought was great and the humiliation was deeply felt. Even in the days of Jeremiah several centuries later the ruins of it could still be seen as a reminder of God’s terrible wrath at wayward and rebellious people (Jer. 7:12-14).

God had commanded Moses and Israel through him: “Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Exo. 25:8). The tabernacle thus existed to manifest the presence and power of Jehovah among the nation. It (and its attendant services) also served as a shadow to point mutely to the substance that was to come through Christ. It was a type of the church, the anti-type (cf., Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 8:1-5; 9:1-28). The ark was the sole furnishing to reside regularly throughout the Hebrew year in the Most Holy place or “Holy of holies.” The ark was basically a box made probably of acacia wood (the KJV calls it *shittim*). It was overlaid within and without with pure gold and was two-and-one half cubits long and one-and-a-half cubits high and broad (Exo. 25:10-22). It was surrounded on the top by a rim or crown of gold (v. 11). The lid was the mercy seat ornamented with the two golden cherubim with their wings spread out and their torsos bent in such a fashion as to present the angels as peering into the seat beneath them and the precious mysteries it represented (cf., 1 Pet. 1:12). The mercy seat was of solid gold and was the same length and width as the chest upon which it rested (Exo. 25:17). It was the place of atonement in the Jewish religion and pointed to Christ who would be our propitiation or “mercy seat” (Rom. 3:25—Gr. *hilesterion*). From between the two cherubim was where God communed with Moses and where the presence of God was manifested in splendid glory (called by the rabbis *shekinah*, or “residence” glory). The ark with the mercy seat above was borne by staves that passed through rings in its *feet* (“corners”—KJV) below (Brown, 75-76). It was by use of these staves that the ark was carried out to the battle at Aphek.

The most important object in Israel’s religious practice and consciousness passed into the hands of their mortal enemies, who saw in the trophy a victory not only over Israel but even over Israel’s God!

This occasioned, without doubt, a great celebration among the Philistines, especially in the city of Ashdod, which would be favored to be the recipient of the treasure! As for Israel, it was a disaster of epic proportions, especially when followed shortly by the destruction of Shiloh. Of these events, F. F. Bruce writes:

The bond which united the tribes of Israel together was broken: the central shrine was no more; its priesthood was wiped out (apart from two infants, the grandsons of Eli); the very symbol of Yahweh's presence with His people was in alien hands. The Philistines had triumphed indeed; and it looked as if Israel's glory and national identity had departed for ever (22-23).

ASHDOD'S CELEBRATION

The text indicates that after seizing the ark at Ebenezer, the Philistines brought it to Ashdod, one of the five chief cities of Philistia (*pentapolis*). It is to be identified with the Azotus of New Testament times (Acts 8:40). It was located on the south coast of Palestine near the Nahal Lachish River between Gaza and Joppa. Dagon was one of the principal deities worshiped by its inhabitants (Jennings, 73-74; Unger, 97).

A temple of Dagon has been uncovered at Ugarit (Ras Shamra). Two steles to Dagon at Ugarit have also been discovered, and a city bearing the name "house of Dagon" (Beth Dagon) has been identified in Palestine. Another temple has been excavated at Bethshan along with the temple to Ashtaroth where Saul's armor was displayed by the Philistines as trophies of a later victory (1 Sam. 31:10). Other temples existed in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Northern Phoenicia (Lebanon) (Free, 148; Harrison, 147).

Some older commentators have rejected the view of Philo that Dagon was a vegetation-deity with the name being derived from *dagan*, meaning "corn," and have instead contended that the name is derived from *dag*, meaning "fish, and that Dagon was thus a "fish god" represented as having the head and chest of a man with the body and tail of a fish (Smith, 4:101; Clarke, 2:170, 222; Edersheim, 20-21). More recent scholarship, due to archaeological discoveries, has tended to agree with the view of Philo—especially such is the conclusion of W. F. Albright (Free, 148; Ackroyd, 54). Often associated with such grain-oriented cultures were fertility and orgiastic rites. Edersheim identifies Dagon as "the male god of fertility" (21). The wild revelry that would attend the bringing in of the ark to the heathen city would have been

extensive. Debauchery, homosexuality, promiscuity, bestiality, and all such like would have taken place as the Philistines flaunted themselves and paraded their vices in the sight of the true and living God! One can also imagine the pomp and circumstance associated with the procession as they brought the ark into the city, put it in Dagon's temple, and then set it up in a conspicuous place that would enhance the appearance of Dagon's superiority.

Adam Clarke notes two key reasons why the Philistines would take the ark to Ashdod. He states:

The *motive* which induced the Philistines to set up the ark in the temple of Dagon, may be easily ascertained. It was customary, in all nations, to dedicate the spoils taken from their enemies to their gods: 1. As a *gratitude-offering* for the help which they supposed them to have furnished; and, 2. As a *proof* that their gods, i.e., the gods of the conquerors, were *more powerful* than those of the conquered. It was, no doubt, to insult the God of Israel, and to insult and terrify the people, that they placed his ark in the temple of Dagon (2:223).

In the minds of the Philistines they had vanquished not only Israel, but the God of Israel, and had carried Him captive in the ark! He was now subject to Dagon and servant in Dagon's house! How foolish and unwise men are when puffed up in the vanity of their minds! While they slept, the God of creation was yet awake!

DAGON'S DEMISE

The first morning after the victory celebration, some of the Philistines came into the temple of Dagon—perhaps to perform some rite of homage to their patron deity. They found his image lying prostrate on the floor “before the ark of the Lord.” It appeared as though the image of the pagan god was bowing in reverence before the symbol of the true and living God! As Clarke notes: “This was one proof, which they little expected, of the *superiority* of the God of Israel” (2:223). The Philistines dutifully set their lifeless idol up into its place once again. They *raised* it up. Driver notes that the verb is very expressive here (51). Maybe they ignored the matter as a mere accident, the result perhaps of a tremor that otherwise had gone undetected, but they could not help but sense the irony that their god (upon whom they depended for life and protection) could not protect himself even from the seeming whims of nature.

The second day, however, told a different story. The sight that greeted the early morning visitors to Dagon's house must have caused

them to be taken aback in horror. Not only was the image of the false god once more fallen upon its face, but its head and hands were severed from its torso (*stump*—KJV). The severed parts were lying on the threshold to the sanctuary, and from that time forward none of the priests and people of Ashdod would tread upon the threshold. It is possible that the idea associated with the phrase “only the stump of Dagon was left to him” means that the head and hands may even have been shattered in such a way as to make any hope of repair impossible. What a stunning demonstration of Jehovah God’s power and superiority over Dagon!

How foolish is idolatry of any kind! The prophet Isaiah years later would chide the idolatry of Israel and Judah. Listen to him:

Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it? ye are* even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, *there is* no God; I know not *any*. They that make a graven image *are* all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they *are* their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image *that* is profitable for nothing? (Isa. 44:6-10).

Isaiah prophesies of the shame that will come upon those who fashion and serve idols in their time of travail. He chides them for taking a tree trunk, using some for fire to warm themselves and cook their food, and then fashioning from the remnant an idol that they overlay with gold and then carry into their homes to bow down before and worship. They pray for this god to deliver them. Yet it cannot see nor hear. It cannot move but some man should carry it. It cannot speak nor reason. It is lifeless and powerless. The great “I Am,” however, is living, powerful, active, and knowledgeable. He hears; He speaks; He sees; He interacts with His creation. He knows the ways of men and sees all of their doings. Indeed, “all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). “The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro. 15:3).

The final irony in the ark’s sojourn in the city of Ashdod occurs in 1 Samuel 5:6-8, when “the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, *even*

Ashdod and the coasts thereof.” The broken idol could not protect the people from Jehovah’s wrath. The idol could not even protect itself! Thus, in desperation the ark of God is sent to Gath, and eventually it would find its way by God’s power into the care of the Hebrew people.

Emerods has often been taken to refer to a type of hemorrhoids. The word denotes a tumour of some kind. Ackroyd suggests that they may have been a plague-induced boils that affected even the private parts and colon. Such boils are symptoms of bubonic plague often borne by rats and similar rodents (55-56). The connection with “the golden mice” in 1 Samuel 6:4 supports this view. Edersheim observes: “Judging from the derivation of the word, and from its employment (in Deut. xxviii. 27) in connection with other skin diseases, we regard it as a kind of pestilential boil of a very malignant nature” (21).

CONCLUSION

God demonstrated His power in 1 Samuel 5 in the midst of the Philistines. He had used them to punish the rebellion of Israel under Hophni and Phinehas. Israel’s defeat was not God’s defeat.

It provided an opportunity to accomplish three key things beyond the temporal punishment of the nation. (1) His ultimate end and purpose by Israel would still go forward despite their sins by removing some of the stumblingblocks to His end and purpose. In punishing the rebellious, God preserved the nation itself from fully falling into apostasy. (2) He would also utilize the defeat of the nation to remind the Philistines of the God whom, in their turn to idolatry, they had chosen to forget (cf., Rom. 1:20ff.). (3) Finally, He would provide a public vindication that He is indeed the true and the living God. Neither Dagon nor any other idol could stand against Jehovah God. His superiority over them is seen in His knowledge, wisdom, power, and character. May we learn these lessons well in our own land.

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“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS” ESTHER 4:14

Lee Davis



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INTRODUCTION

If one was in need of a biblical example of the providence of God, there is an Old Testament example that would overwhelmingly illustrate it. The life of Esther exemplifies how God providentially deals with man. It is interesting to note that in the book of Esther, the name of God does not appear, yet one can see the hand of God in every line of the book (Coffman, 243). In the book of Esther there is an encouraging statement made by Mordecai that gets to the heart of the great providence of God. The Bible states:

Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom **for such a time as this?** (Est. 4:13-14).

Mordecai believed that the Jews would be delivered from the edict of Haman and all would be well, whether or not Esther complied with his request (Rogers, 303). At the heart of Haman's statement is the

confidant assurance that God is involved in our lives in a providential way.

What is providence? First, God’s working providentially today has nothing whatsoever to do with the miraculous. It is a documented biblical fact that the age of New Testament miracles was confined to the first century and that today there is no need for the miraculous activity of God (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:8-13; Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). Second, even though the aforementioned point is the case, it is not the case that God is “dormant” in His dealings with men, i.e., deism. God does work, but the question is: “How does He work?” The providence of God, extended to men, is administered through the natural laws that were established by the Lord Himself. This is, for a lack of a better term, *general* providence. As providence deals with the spiritual well-being of God’s children, it can be termed *special* providence. Wayne Jackson stated it this way:

What is “providence”? It is the implementation of the divine will through events that seem perfectly natural on the surface, yet clearly the Lord has manipulated events, consistent with man’s free will, for the accomplishment of His own purposes. Providence differs from a miracle in that a miracle is direct; it involves the suspension of natural law, whereas providence employs natural law for the accomplishment of Heaven’s will. It is through providence, and not miracles, that God operates in our lives today (39).

Queen Esther had a choice. She could approach the king and intercede on behalf of her people, or she could remain silent and not be the one that God would have used to protect his people. In the text under consideration, Esther willingly became a participant in the providence of God. She went to the king even though she had not been summoned. This could have meant death for her. She went to him on the third day, having fasted for this period. She then methodically went about thwarting the scheme of Haman. She persuaded the king to allow the Jews to defend themselves. More than this, the Jews were allowed to aggressively destroy their enemies throughout the Persian Empire. Haman was hanged on his own gallows which is the very same punishment that Haman had planned for Mordecai. This deliverance led to the institution of the feast of Purim. More important than this feast is that the nation of Israel was preserved through which would come the Messiah.

While it is true that we may not find ourselves in the identical position of Esther as it relates to the providence of God, the fact is, we are presented with situations and choices in life that are providentially designed. However, the nature of providence lends itself to ambiguity. Generally, when a saint came to realize that he was involved in the providence of God, the realization came after the fact. While it is true that inspired men affirmed the fact of God's providence in our lives, seldom would they affirm a specific incident as such. For example, the apostle Paul uses *perhaps* to describe the situation of the run away slave, Onesimus. Paul did not affirm to Philemon that Onesimus's situation was providential. Yet, the Holy Spirit (though Paul) uses a word that conveyed this possibility (Phm. 15). There were occasions where the providence of God was affirmed. Joseph was the second unto Pharaoh and had great power and influence. Joseph had no doubt that it was the providence of God that had put him in that position. But this confidence did not come to fruition until after he had gone through many hurtful and intimidating events (Gen. 45:5-8) So, while it is true that there is some vagueness involved in our knowing if an incident in life is providential or not, it still remains true that providence exists.

In this lesson providence will be examined from three distinct areas. The first area is the family. The second area is the nation. The third area has to do with the kingdom. We can (must) be willing participants in the providence of God. To do otherwise is to bring upon ourselves, destruction (Est. 4:15).

HAVE WE COME TO OUR FAMILIES "FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?"

The family is the oldest institution that God has ordained for the good of man (Gen. 1-2; Mat. 19). And within this unit, God has designated and commanded a specific design. The Lord has always intended that a male is to marry a female. The modern idea of *same sex marriages* is repugnant to all right thinking people (Mat. 19:4-6; Rom. 1:26-27). How long will the God of Heaven allow this nation to exist when and if this situation is mainstreamed into our society? God hates this sin, and if we are to be faithful to Him, we must hate it also.

Not only are males to marry females and vice versa, they are only to marry someone who is eligible for marriage, otherwise their marriage will not be authorized by God. If someone has been divorced for something other than their spouse's fornication and then remarries, this

person continues to commit adultery. If the church compromises on this, or any other matter of obligation, we will cease being the church of Christ!

Today, we need fathers who will be the heads of their families. To be the head of the family is not to be tyrannical or overbearing! Husbands must love their wives and children with the same love Christ has and does express to His church (Eph. 5:23, 25). If a husband mistreats his wife, his very soul is in danger (1 Pet. 3:1-7).

Not only is the husband to act appropriately, so must the wife. She is to be a submissive participant to and with the husband (Eph. 5:22, 24). In today's *politically correct* society, the notion of submission by the wife to the husband is ridiculed and maligned. But, if we are to be God's people, we must be biblically correct and not worry about pleasing the world.

It is in this designed and ordained unit to which God, ideally, wants a child added (Eph. 6:4). Parenting is a considerable responsibility. Yet, so many people enter into this situation with no clue as to how they are to parent a child. God wants two **married** and committed adults to form a home and to conceive children. Today, many enter the marriage relationship **after** the child has been born. This situation is contributing to the destruction of the family. So often is the case where the children do not even know whom their *real* mother or father is. Divorce has so affected our society that it has changed the very meaning of the word family. But, we do not have the right to call something "the family" that is not in keeping with the Divine pattern.

What can we do then, as Christians, to participate in the providence of God on this level? All of the family of man is given the opportunity to form a family that they may benefit from the great blessings of this unit. This is the *general* type of providence that is extended to mankind as a whole. However, within this situation we, as children of God, can and must look at our responsibility of family as an opportunity to participate in the plan of God. First, let us make sure that we strive to marry those who are faithful children of God. While there are exceptions, Christians who marry non-Christians have trouble with their "father-in-law." The second thing that can be done is for each Christian husband and wife to be individually dedicated to the cause of Christ (Mat. 6:33; Luke 14:26; Mat. 19:29). Unless we are devoted to God, we cannot make the impact that we should make on the world. Third,

let us conform ourselves to the biblical roles that God has given us in the family unit. Fourth, let each husband and wife ask themselves what they can do to help others. Several things can be done to fulfill this desire. For this author and his wife, adoption was what we have done to help others. If we can impact the life of a child for good, only eternity can determine the potential good that will be forthcoming. We also are involved in foster care. It may be that the only good influence that these foster children will have in their lives will come from the Christian family who cares for them. Just think—one adopted or foster child could become a great influence in the church of our Lord. Only time and the providence of God will be able to demonstrate this fully.

HAVE WE COME TO THE NATION “FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?”

Government has been appointed by God to bring structure to a society. The basic function of government is to protect the innocent and to punish the evildoer (Rom. 13:1-7). And while this is what government should do, at times it leaves these parameters and becomes a corrupting influence. When this happens God will chastise that government or even take it out of the way altogether (Deaver, 231).

We, as children of God, have the responsibility to live in such a way as to support the government when it legislates properly (Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 2:17). When a government becomes corrupt, the Christian is to obey the Law of God, even if it were to violate the laws of the land (Acts 5:29; Dan. 3-6). It should not be our intention to rebel against the authorities, but rather to obey God no matter what the cost to us may be.

Again the question is asked: “What can we do to participate in the providence of God?” This situation would fall under the former subject: *general* providence. It is the case that we can do things that would contribute to an upright and godly atmosphere in our nation. For the past eight years, we who believe in God and the ethics of the Bible have been under a constant attack from the “powers that be.” While it is true that we respect the office of the President, it is totally ungodly and unchristian to support the acts of the past administration. Bill Clinton was a stumbling block to our society. His legacy is one of dishonesty and corruption. But, tragically, many so-called Christians, walked into the voting booth and checked their consciences and ethics at the door. Are we to be faithful to God in every aspect of our lives

except for our political beliefs? We live in a Constitutional Republic, and thus we are allowed to participate in our form of government. We can choose to vote for men and women that are more nearly following the Bible than others. We have the freedom of speech that allows us to speak out against the ungodliness that might exist in our institutions of government. Yet, many times this ungodliness is met with cowardly silence. God will hold each of us accountable for what we have done or not done as it relates to everything in our lives including politics.

What specifically can we do to make a difference? First, we must pray for our leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-4). This commandment is listed first because it is the most important act in which we can participate. Many times the last thing we do is to pray. We do this as if we are saying, "Well, we have done everything we can do, so I guess the only thing we have left to do is pray." This scenario unfolds to our shame! Prayer must be the first line of defense, not the last act of desperation. Where is our faith? Do we expect God to answer our prayers? For example, for approximately seventy years we prayed that the "Iron Curtain" would fall and that the Gospel would go into the Communist Block unhindered. The Wall was taken down and the yoke of communism was broken. The attitude displayed by many was one of surprise and disbelief. Why was it a surprise? We had prayed for this very thing for seventy years? Did we pray these prayers out of habit and without faith? There was nothing miraculous involved in the answering of those prayers. It was the providence of God and we participated in it.

Second, we must speak out against the sin and corruption in the government. This is a forbidden topic to many in the church today. Is not the example clear from the New Testament what we can do to help correct this situation? What did John the Baptist do when he heard about the adulterous relationship between Herod and Herodias? Did he keep his mouth shut and proclaim to the world: "That is none of my business?" Did he overlook this malignancy on the leadership of his country and go his merry way? No! John spoke out against this ungodly and putrid display (Luke 3:19-20; Mark 6:16-29). Why do not God's children speak out more against sin and corruption in the government? Could it be that they might have to suffer some persecution?

Third, let us educate ourselves about the candidates and their positions on subjects regarding ethics and morality. Where do they stand on the topic of abortion? What do they think about morality and godliness

in the classroom? For too long now, we have let the Denominational world take the lead in this area. When this happens, people cannot see the beauty of the Bible and the pristine glory of Christ's body. Let us awake in order to fight the battle against sin and corruption in our government!

HAVE WE COME TO THE KINGDOM “FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?”

The church of our Lord was established to make salvation available to all people (Eph. 2:11-16; 5:26). When we obeyed the Gospel, and thus became members of the church, we became active participants in the work of God (1 Cor. 3:9). Being in the kingdom demands of us complete compliance to the commands of our Captain and King (1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 2:3-4). We are to fight against the “god of this world” and never leave the front lines of battle (Eph. 6:10-18; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 6:12). This has to do with the more specific providence, *special* providence. God will use His faithful children to further His cause. Also, God will do what is best for the faithful Christian.

How then do we participate in the providence of God in this area? First, all of God's children must take the Gospel to the whole world (Mat. 28:18-20). For far too long, we have done little to advance the cause of Christ beyond our own borders. How are people going to have the opportunity to hear and obey the Gospel if we remain mute and motionless (Rom. 10:13-18)? If we make ourselves open to every opportunity to teach the truth to others, we will be able to participate in the providence of God (2 Tim. 4:1-4; John 7:17; 6:44-45; 2 Tim. 2:2). The desire of God is that all should be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4). However, we must do our part in the fulfilling of His dream (Mark 16:15-16).

Second, all of God's children must defend the Gospel before the world (Phi. 1:17; Jude 3; 1 Pet. 3:15; Tit. 1:9). Not only is this privilege incumbent upon the preacher, it is also to be done by the elders and every other member of the church. Many (exact percentages would probably surprise us) members of the church today are not aware that they are soldiers. Many are actively opposing the truth and think it disdainful for anyone to stand up for what is right and against that which is false. They violate their own pseudo principle of pacifism. The reward for our successfully waging this war will be Heaven itself.

Third, all of God's children are to live the Gospel in the world (Phi. 1:27). Among the greatest advertisements of the worthy nature of New Testament Christianity is the life of a faithful Christian. On the other hand, very few things detract more from the reputation of the cause of Christ than that of a lukewarm, filthy, and unfaithful child of God. They are "in love" with the world and what it has to offer (2 Tim. 4:10; Jam. 4:4). If one is to be faithful to the Father one must not love this world with its ungodliness (1 John 2:15-17). We must not be so influenced by the world that we hold little if any distinction from it (Jam. 1:27). Our attitude must be that we hate the "garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23). It is possible to live above the world and its sinfulness (Rev. 3:4). When we cleanse ourselves of that which easily besets us, then and only then, will be ready to be used by the Lord (2 Tim. 2:19-21; Heb. 12:1-2).

CONCLUSION

We, like Esther, can be willing participants in the providence of God. If we chose not to live as we should, God's plans will not fail. He will raise up someone who will participate in His work. Let us remember that we have but one earthly life to live. And we have come to this point in time for a reason.

Our families are under attack like no other time in our nation's history. The long held biblical lines are being blurred and changed. We cannot turn a deaf ear to the situation and hope that the problems will correct themselves. We are the wealthiest people in the world, and yet we can be so selfish. Some will not help others because they are so covetous and worldly. Some are so concerned about having a *nest egg* that they refuse to help others. What are we to do? What would the Lord do? To ask this question is to answer it.

We are in a fight for the very soul of this country. Will we support people in public office that will keep us on a morally and ethically upright path? Or, will we delude ourselves into thinking that it does not matter what your political preference is? One may think that he or she is in the voting booth alone, but the fact is, God is there also!

If you will examine the armor of God in Ephesians 6, you will notice that no provision is made for the "back side" of the soldier. It has been expressed many times that the Lord did not provide protection for those that "turn tail" and runaway. How many of our people are ignorant of the problems in the brotherhood because they chose to be

in this state? Somehow, they think that if they remain in the dark, they will not be accountable for their inaction. Ignorance may be *bliss* to those who refuse to educate themselves, but as long as this attitude persists, we will lose many brethren.

Will we not, then, choose to do the will of God and thus participate in the great plan of Jehovah?

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GOD IS PSALM 19:1

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INTRODUCTION

Psalm Nineteen is a remarkable chapter. Believed by some to be the greatest poem in the Psalms, it is indicative of two grand truths regarding God's glorious revelation—His Work and Word. These two truths relate to man by appealing to a third aspect the psalmist mentions, the soul.

Contemplate therefore either the Skies, or the Scriptures, or the Soul, and you are face to face with God. In the skies is revealed His glory; in the Scriptures, His greatness; and in the soul, His grace (Scroggie, 123).

This psalm contemplates all three.

There are two approaches to this psalm. First, David is writing about the two witnesses of God—Nature (vv. 1-6) and the Word (vv. 7-14). In natural revelation we are introduced to the revelation of God: the Creator. In special revelation (God's Word), we come to know God: the Redeemer. These two parts form a chorus "which blend so beautifully to sing a coherent song of the majesty of God" (Warren, 1:109). Delitzsch believes Psalm 19 to be a prayer celebrating God's revelation of Himself in nature and in the Law (Keil and Delitzsch, 5:280).

Leupold approaches the psalm a little differently. He argues that the first part is subordinate to the second. He explains that the first part (vv. 1-6) praises the Giver of the Law and prepares us for the glory of the Law. Leupold would title it: *The Glory of the Law of the Lord*, dividing it with the first six verses speaking of the glory of the Lawgiver and then verses seven through fourteen dealing with the glory of the Law (176-177).

Nevertheless, God's existence is clearly proposed in no uncertain terms. *God Is*, is the message of the psalmist, and He has a Law! Being able to confidently know this truth is truly encouraging. One does not have to run from philosophy to philosophy, wondering in guesswork fashion, what to do and believe. There is sufficient information to satisfy the seeking heart of God's existence. There is great comfort in knowing we serve a God who has overwhelmingly revealed Himself.

GOD EXISTS (Psalm 19:1-14) **Nature (Psalm 19:1-6)**

Verses 1-4

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world (vv. 1-4).

David spent many days and nights in fields and pastures overseeing Jesse's sheep. There was much time for thought and reflection. As he pondered the blue sky above and the vastness of the starry nights, his human curiosity sought for answers. He knew that it all did not appear by accident. The creation offers encouraging evidence that there is something beyond man, something great and good. The creation does not tell of the glorious message of Calvary, but it does tell of the skillful workmanship of its Maker, humbling a man and bringing him to his knees.

There is a simple fact that must be affirmed by all reasonable people—every finite being or thing has a cause. This is the cosmological argument for the existence of God.¹ Being an infinite being, Jehovah is the **First Cause** of everything! The very existence of creation, David tells us, proclaims the glory of God. "It is as though the word 'glory' were written in capital letters across the very heavens and the firmament" (Leupold, 179).

A more specific inspection causes us to see God's handiwork. This is emphasized in another argument—the teleological argument. Teleology is the study of the evidences of **design** in nature. The value of this argument is affirmed in other passages (Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:19-20; Job 12:7-9). From the smallest electron to the largest galaxy, it all fits together. Precision, design, order, exactness—God daily presents Himself to the *public eye* in such a manner that men cannot open their eyes without being able to reasonably see the hand of a Creator in it all. The complex and intricate design found throughout our universe could not possibly have come without some kind of Supreme Architect and Designer behind it. Where there is **order** there must be an **Orderer**. Where there is a **plan** there must be a **Planner**. And, where there is **design** there must be a **Designer**! The Great Designer is God. "For every house is builded by some *man*; **but he that built all things is God**" (Heb. 3:4). This truth caused Isaiah to write, "But now, O LORD, thou *art* our father; we *are* the clay, and thou our potter; and we all *are* the work of thy hand" (Isa. 64:8). Can any intelligent person believe that *mindless matter* created itself and all that we witness in our world? A watch requires a watchmaker. A book requires an author. Could a room full of toddlers punching a keyboard ever produce *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*? Did the four human faces on the granite cliff of Mount Rushmore result from natural occurrences of erosion or storms? What of the forming of a real human face? The psalmist ponders this:

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, *and* curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there was* none of them (Psa. 139:13-16).

Brand and Yancey quote Augustine as saying:

Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering (5).

David writes in Psalm 19:2 that the mere passing of day proclaims God's existence. Each day and night is here poetically envisioned as proclaiming that God is! In the next verse we are told that there is not

a place on this earth where the inhabitants cannot so reason. The creation has a *voice!* This voice is loud and clear and is so apparent that its rejection is inexcusable (Rom. 1:20).

Verses 4b-6

In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which *is* as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, *and* rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth *is* from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

The greatest of the heavenly bodies, the sun, likewise attests to God's majesty and is a herald of Jehovah's excellence. David uses two symbols to illustrate the point. The groom leaving his quarters to meet his bride is to invite ideas of the strength and fervor of the sun as it continually functions.

As the sun comes up each morning and moves across the sky in mysterious beauty, it is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber all aglow, handsomely arrayed, shining with youthful happiness, setting out to claim his bride. The rising sun is like a strong youth—prepared, confident, eager, determined and ready to run in a race and prove his strength (Cloer, 46).

A second figure speaks of its cycle or circuit.

Though the ancients could scarcely have had a conception of what happens astronomically, they all noted that a great distance had to be covered and a repetition of the same course had to be run with unwearyed strength (Leupold, 180).

The sun faithfully and obediently runs its God-given course. Its power and healing are felt by human beings from one end of the earth to the other. If anyone, anywhere, should miss the message which the sun declares, it is not because he has not been blessed by its rays (Cloer, 46).

God asks, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?" (Job 38:4-5). The earth's dimensions are precisely measured. Its diameter at the equator is 7,926 miles, while at the poles it is only 7,899. Our earth is not a perfect sphere. If it were, its rotation would pile up the waters of the ocean around the equator with a devastating effect, drawing them away from all the northern and southern parts. We have learned that light travels in electromagnetic waves at a speed of 186,000 miles per second (660 million MPH). It only takes eight minutes for light to travel its path from the sun to the earth. The sun is 93,000,000 miles

from the earth. The sun is 109 times larger than the earth (more than a million earths could be placed into the sun if it were a hollow ball). The sun has a surface temperature of 10,000°F. Without the sun we would die. If it were significantly closer to the earth, we would burn up. Did all this come to be by accident? No way!

THERE IS NO GOD. All of the wonders around us are accidental. No almighty hand made a thousand-billion stars. They made themselves. No power keeps them on their steady course. The earth spins itself to keep the oceans from falling off toward the sun. Infants teach themselves to cry when they are hungry or hurt. A small flower invented itself so that we could extract digitalis for sick hearts. The earth gave itself day and night, tilted itself so that we get seasons. Without the magnetic poles man would be unable to navigate the trackless oceans of water and air, but they just grew there. How about the sugar thermostat in the pancreas? It maintains a level of sugar in the blood sufficient for energy. Without it, all of us would fall into a coma and die. Why does snow sit on mountain tops waiting for the warm spring sun to melt it at just the right time for the young crops below to drink? A very lovely accident. The human heart will beat 70 or 80 years without faltering. How does it get sufficient rest between beats? A kidney will filter poison from the blood, and leave good things alone. How does it know one from the other? Who gave the human tongue flexibility to form words, and a brain to understand them, but denied it to all other animals? Who showed a womb how to take the love of two persons and keep splitting a tiny ovum until, in time, a baby would have the proper number of fingers, eyes and ears and hair in the right places, and come into the world when it is strong enough to sustain life? **There is no God?** (Bishop).

Although the natural world provides proofs for God's existence, one could never know the details of our own origins, the nature of sin, salvation, and what God expects of us. God has revealed these essential things through His verbal utterance. The Bible is the Word of God and has been accurately recorded by men inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Bible is not God, but it is God speaking.

The existence of the Bible is still another evidence for God's existence. That it exists, there can be no denial. It can be seen with the eyes and touched with the fingers. The nose can detect the leathery odor, and the ears can perceive the reading of its words. We believe the spiritual tongue can taste its sweet flavor (Psa. 19:10b; Eze. 3:1-3; Rev. 10:9-10). The Bible appeals to something in man which is not physical. How can the atheist explain man's desire for something other than the material?

The Bible is no product of mere men. How can one explain such internal evidences of the Bible as its unity, predictive prophecy, scientific foreknowledge, and its lack of contradictions? And what is the answer to the many external proofs? The Bible's divine nature has been demonstrated in its geographical accuracy and historical correctness. Archeology has confirmed the many historical facts of the Bible. For instance, in the late 1800s, **Sir William Ramsay** (biblical skeptic, British scholar, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Aberdeen, and Curator of the British Museum in London) set out on an archeological expedition in Asia Minor based on his interest in its history. He reluctantly turned to the New Testament book of Acts as possible data on the geography of Asia Minor, for he considered it "a highly imaginative and carefully colored account of primitive Christianity." Luke mentions thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands in the Mediterranean Sea. When he completed his extensive research and travels to all of Luke's places (including Paul's missionary journeys), Ramsay gave up his skepticism and considered Luke an historian of the first rank deserving of a place among the greatest historians of the world. **How is it that Luke made no mistakes?** Only inspiration can account for Luke's precision (Mounce, 181ff)! Where did the Bible come from? Only two options—Man or God! The evidence points away from man toward God. The simplest but most powerful argument for the divine authorship of the Bible is:

1. If it is the case that the Bible is of such nature that it could not have been produced by man, then the Bible is the inspired Word of God.
2. It is the case that the Bible is of such a nature that it could not have been produced by man.
3. Therefore, the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

A study of the many evidences of the divine nature of the Bible truly encourages us to have a deeper and stronger faith. Life can be lived with a surety of great and wonderful things to come for the righteous.

Let us now consider what David says of that Word.

The Word (Psalm 19:7-14)

Verse 7

"The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple."

God appeals to our inner man—the soul; our spiritual selves. There is here clear recognition that we are more than matter in motion (Mat. 10:28). Because of sin, that soul *becomes* corrupt (Eph. 2:1-3) and is in need of purifying (1 Pet. 1:22; Rev. 7:14). The Word of God has the power to change the soul, cleansing it from sin (Rom. 1:16; 1 Pet. 1:22). The Word is perfect in that it is complete and fully able to equip us as God’s man (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and to provide for us all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4). It converts the soul! *Converting* refers to God’s Word being able to restore and bring back. Thus, it has reference to imparting newness of life (Keil and Delitzsch, 286). The Word of God can change a vile sinner into a righteous servant of God. The warning and instructive attestation of God is a foundation (*sure*) we can build upon giving us true wisdom (Pro. 3:5-6).

Even our humanistic society agrees that something is wrong. However, nothing they offer works. The reason is that to solve our social problems, man’s heart must change. And that which is rejected, the Bible, is the only thing perfectly fitted in “converting the soul” (v. 7). Something is wrong, but the Bible is right!

Verse 8

“The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes.”

Through the Word of God, we are told what is right. God maps out a straight course (Gen. 18:25; Deu. 6:18). Without God man has no moral compass. His way becomes confused and chaotic (Pro. 16:25; Jer. 10:23). Man does have a sense of moral oughtness, but that sense cannot be refined or sharpened, giving proper direction, without God’s Word. One does not have to walk in darkness for God enlightens us. The Word of God makes the mind clear, healthy, and fresh (Keil and Delitzsch, 286).

Verse 9

“The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether.”

Here the Word of God is referred to as the **fear** of Jehovah. It is the revealed way in which God is to be feared. David wrote, “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD” (Psa. 34:11) (Keil and Delitzsch, 287).

God tells me what is pure and clean. Clearly, we do not live in a clean world—turn on the television for proof. These clean judgments are immutable truths that will continue to have meaning and application.

Verse 10

“More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”

God tells me what to spend my life seeking. “In David’s day, the most desired metal was gold and the sweetest delicacy was honey” (Cloer, 46). Thus, God’s Word is more important and precious than anything a human being can endeavor to pursue.

Verse 11

“Moreover by them is thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward.”

The Word is a “danger sign” to man. God warns for man’s benefit; to prevent many emotional and spiritual problems. To the humble soul, God’s precepts are not burdensome or grievous (1 John 5:3). There is great reward in adhering to the Word—happy homes, success in life, peace of mind, and most importantly, salvation of the soul.

Verses 12-13

Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*.
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have
dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from
the great transgression.

Not only is it a copy of the divine Will, but the Word of God is also a mirror of the soul. It knows us. God gives understanding of vital things otherwise confusing. He deals with our sin, and instructs how it can be conquered, and how we can be relieved of guilt. Jeremiah stated, “O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

Verse 14

“O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.”

He is our strength and redeemer. Leupold comments:

The psalmist very appropriately closes his prayer with a humble plea that that which his mouth has uttered and his heart devoutly meditated

on may be well pleasing in His sight, who is his *rock* on which he builds and his *redeemer* who delivers him in his many needs (180).

An Encouraging Truth

David provides us with a truth that gives meaning to life itself. The fact that there is a mighty Creator in control of all things gives us security. We are encouraged to continue, seeking to live in His absolute presence one day. Without God, pessimism and vanity are all we have. This is demonstrated in the infidel's view of death. Aristotle, wrote: "[Death] is the most to be feared of all things...for it appears to be the end of everything; and for the deceased there appears to be no longer either any good or any evil" (Jackson, 1). Note the emptiness of the famous lawyer and confirmed atheist, Clarence Darrow:

"Life is like a ship on the sea, tossed by every wave and by every wind, a ship headed for no port, and no harbor, with no rudder, no compass, no pilot, simply floating for a time, then lost in the waves." He further wrote: "I love my friends, but they all must come to a tragic end" (Turner, 408).

Tolstoy, prior to reaching the conclusion that there is a God, was continually haunted by the thought of death. He wrote:

"Today or tomorrow sickness and death will come to those I love or to me; nothing will remain but stench and worms—sooner or later my affairs, whatever they be, will be forgotten, and I shall not exist. Then why go on making the effort?" (Turner, 408).

Tolstoy went on to explain that "suicide is a way of strength and energy," and observed that "when a person realizes that dreadful truth, and yet clings to life, he lacks strength to act rationally." He admitted he was weak because he did not have the strength to commit suicide, which he believed to be the rational thing to do (Turner, 408). This is the consequence of disbelief. If there is no God, then this must be our philosophy.

However, as A. W. Dicus beautifully expressed:

There is beyond the azure blue a God, concealed from human sight,
He tinted skies with heav'nly hue and framed the worlds with His great
might.

There is a God, He is alive, In Him we live, and we survive.

Many of our hymns are suggestive of the meaningfulness of life with God. Alton H. Howard wrote:

He took my burdens all away, up to a brighter day,
He gave me a song, a wonderful song.
A wonderful song I now can sing, in my heart joy bells ring,

He gave me a song, a wonderful song.
 He gave me a song to sing about, He lifted me from sin and doubt.
 Oh praise His name, He is my King, a wonderful song, He is to me.

If there be no God, heaven could not have come down and glory could not have filled my soul. At the cross, the Savior could not have made me whole. My night would not be turned to day. Jesus would not be a *Wonderful Savior*, *The Loving Shepherd*, or *The Great Physician*. God would not be a mighty fortress. There would be no empty mansion waiting for me, and earth **would** hold all treasures. There would be no use in surrendering **all** to Jesus because there would be no *Amazing Grace* and no burdens lifted at Calvary. There would be nothing above the bright blue but darkness. There would be no beautiful robes so white, no beautiful land of light, no beautiful home so bright, no beautiful crown to wear, and no beautiful isle of somewhere. There would be no blessed assurance, no tie that binds our hearts in Christian love and no fellowship of kindred minds like to that above. There would be no precious book divine nor Bible to give me or anyone else; no star of gladness gleaming to cheer the “wand’rer lone and tempest-tossed.” What purpose would there be in bringing in the sheaves, for being a worker for the Lord, or a soul winner for Jesus? What reason would there be to bring Christ your broken life or unite to sing, for God would not be love. There would be no firm foundation, no hilltop of glory, no rock of ages, no home on God’s celestial shore, no unchanging hand to hold on to, no land of fadeless day, no joyful pilgrims to sing on, no everlasting arm to lean on, and no great day coming. This is a dim picture indeed!

There is a wonderful harmony in theism. This self-evident truth draws us closer to God’s very existence. Man does not have to be led in different directions but can place his trust and reliance in a God of unity. God was the First *Harmonizer* and does all things with a perfect unity (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). An indication of the unity of theism is seen in Ephesians 4:

THE UNITY OF THEISM—Ephesians 4:1-6

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; Endeavouring 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 of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Notice that God is said to be the Father of all, above all, through all, and in you all. Although we reject pantheism and panentheism, we do believe God fills our world with his presence and upholds “all things by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). On the other hand, the infidel must walk in hopeless confusion doubting and wavering at every turn. Consider the following parody of the atheist’s rendition of Eph. 4:1-6:

THE DISUNITY OF ATHEISM

I therefore, the prisoner of evolution, beseech you to walk worthy of the skepticism in which the prince of this world has called you. With all presumption and prating, following the call of your own pleasure and personal preferences, doing that which is right in your own eyes. Endeavoring to be an infidel regardless of the logical contradictions, disunity, and a rejection of the facts and evidence. There is no body, no Spirit, no hope, no Lord, no faith, no baptism, and especially no God who is above all, and through all, and in you all!

Thus, infidels reduce the seven ones of Ephesians 4 to zero!

Theism calls for such noble virtues as self-denial, humbleness, long-suffering, and courage on the part of all its adherents; it also promises spiritual joy as an earnest of eternal life and happiness. Alexander Campbell wrote:

Peace of mind, a heaven-born equanimity, a good conscience, a pure heart, universal love, a triumphant joy, and a glorious hope of immortal bliss, were its reward in hand. An incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance in the presence of God, with the society of angels, principalities and powers, of the loftiest intelligence and most comprehensive knowledge, brighter than the sun, in the glories of light and love eternal, are its rewards in the future. But now, let us ask, what boon, what honor, what reward have our opponents to offer for its renunciation? Yes, this is the question which the sequel must develop. To what would they convert us! What heaven have they to propose! What immortality to reveal! What sublime views of creation and a creator! What authentic record of the past! What prophetic hope of the future! What account of our origin! What high ultimatum of our destiny! What terrors have they to offer to stem the torrent of destruction! What balm and consolation to the sons and daughters of anguish! To these and a thousand kindred questions, they must, and they *will* answer, *none*; none at all. They promise to him that disbelieveth the Founder of the Christian religion; to him that neglects and disdains the salvation of the gospel; to him who tramples under foot the blood of the New Institution, and insults the Spirit of favor; to him who traduces Moses, Daniel, and Job; to him who vilifies Jesus, Paul, Peter,

James, and John; to him who devotes his soul to the lusts of the flesh; who disdains heaven; who defies his appetites; who degrades himself to a mere animal, and eulogizes philosophy; to this man they promise eternal sleep, and everlasting death. This is the faith, the hope, and joy, for which they labor with so much zeal, and care and pain.

Divesting man of all that renders life a blessing and death supportable, denuding him of the dignity and the honor which have even been the admiration of the wise and good, and reducing him wholly to the earth, is by our opponents the true philosophy, the just science, the valuable knowledge (9-10).

Knowing there is a God makes the dark days brighter, the painful times tolerable, the rocky roads smoother, and the heartaches livable.

CONCLUSION

There comes a time in the life of all when they need to lift their eyes to the stars, not to worship them as do astrologers, occultists, and other idol worshipers; but to see the face of the Creator:

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; not one faileth (Isa. 40:26).

In times of trial and confusion, tribulation and chaos, we need to look to God.

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? *there is* no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength (Isa. 40:28-29).

Even those who you might expect to be strong, vibrant, and full of life are subject to the forces of life: “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall” (Isa. 40:30). But when life bears upon us and causes us to become weary and fall, God will give us new life if we wait upon Him and let Him lead us: “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31). To wait on the Lord is a synonym for faith. It means to lean heavily on Him for strength to endure life’s trials. Such persons will be like a powerful eagle, soaring high upon the winds with our hope brightened. In the wearisome and chaotic days that lay ahead, that can dim our hope and dull our faith, we must look up

and grasp anew the vision of God in heaven—He is there if we will look!

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ENDNOTE

¹McCord holds that the meaning of "cosmological," pertaining to order, does not fit the argument from cause. "Cosmological" is derived from *cosmeo*, "to arrange, to set in order." We find a valid argument for God's existence in the orderly arrangement of the universe, but it is not the argument from causality. *Cosmos* is the opposite of *chaos*; cosmology is a synonym for eutaxiology, a study of good arrangement. Perhaps *aetiological*, pertaining to causes, would be more exact in describing the argument from cause. As quoted from Hugo McCord, (1989), "The Case From Theism," *The Case For Christianity*, ed. Edwin Jones (Knoxville, TN: Primar of Tennessee), 15th Annual East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions Lectureship.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

PSALM 23

Harrell Davidson



Harrell Davidson was born in Gibson County, Tennessee. He began leading singing for meetings at twelve years of age and was encouraged to preach the gospel. He attended Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He preached his first sermon in 1955 and began preaching every Sunday in October, 1958. Harrell preaches in several gospel meetings and lectureships each year. He has preached in most of the 50 states and in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has written one study book on *Marriage and The Christian Home* (out of print). Harrell is the son of a former elder and preacher. He has worked with the church in Obion, Tennessee for the past 21 years, which is only 20 miles from where he was born and raised.

Harrell is married to the former Carrielyn Spurlock. They have four children—three boys and one girl—and five grandchildren.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The main text under consideration is Psalm 23. It is this writer's judgement that we will better understand this chapter if we go over to the New Testament and understand the work of our Good Shepherd. Let us look at some things in John 10, among other places. This chapter is set in the background of the Jews refusing to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. It should also be noted that the Calvinist finds comfort in this chapter. They teach that the sheep are the elect and goats are the non-elect. In John 10:1 Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." Think about the nation of Israel. Draw a circle on a blackboard or in your mind and place within that circle the Pharisees who had taken over the nation for their own benefit. They were the dominant power and are ruling under Rome. They intended to have an earthly king. A sheepfold would be an enclosure where sheep would stay.

"But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep" (John 10:2). There are three figures that are already in use: (1) the Shepherd, (2) the Door, and (3) the Good Shepherd. All of these are

distinct categories that Jesus uses. This is saying that Jesus came through the door of the Old Testament. Matthew and Luke give the lineage of Christ. This is the door through which Jesus came. The Pharisees did not want this kind of Messiah. Jesus said, “To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out” (John 10:3).

Who is the porter? In studying John we have no problem understanding this question. In Isaiah 40:3ff there is the prophecy of John the Baptist being the forerunner of Christ. However, let us look at John 1:19-26:

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not.

What is He saying? John the Baptist is the porter to introduce the nation of Israel to the Messiah. This is the figure that Jesus has in mind in these passages. Then notice as John continues:

This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God (John 1:30-34).

Look at John 10:3: “To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.” If we can understand two or three things, we can solve some problems of what it meant to *hear* Him. Here is national Israel. This is the flock or the fold. In John 1:11 the apostle records that He came to His own and they received Him not. Those that received Him were individual sheep out of the nation of Israel. Jesus began to call them by

name. If you look back to the last part of chapter one, you see Christ calling one of them Simon; others are also named. Jesus came to lead out of the nation those that would believe and follow them. He came to lead men in the faith that Abraham had. The sheep hear His voice. These are the ones that followed Him from the whole nation. These are the people that should have been prepared through the Old Testament for Christ. Romans 9 teaches that we have two Israels. Paul said, "All of Israel is not Israel." He is leading them out, and they become another flock; we will see that when we get down to John 10:16, when Jesus says, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd." We will read about a little flock. This little flock heard, believed, and followed Him. In John 1 we read how He spoke and they followed Him. This will be the little or new flock that would be the Lord's church. Look at Galatians 6:16: "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace *be* on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." The original sheep that formed the church came from where? They are national Israel, that is, those that heard and followed. Now look back at the blind man in John 9. The blind man heard Jesus, followed Him, and worshiped Him. What did the Pharisees representing national Israel do? They sought to kill Him.

"And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:4). They knew His voice. Simon, Nathaniel, John, and others realized that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. That is what it means by saying "they heard His voice." The Pharisees did not believe that He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament. So here is the contrast. If you do not see these two groups, you will never understand the 10th chapter of John and the Good Shepherd. In John 10:19 there was a division among the Jews for these sayings.

What divided them? Here are the two groups. Look back to John 7:43: "So there was a division among the people because of him." What kind of division is taking place? Here are some who followed Him, but the bulk of the nation would not follow Him. Look at John 9:16: "This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them." We thus observe what was happening among the people; some would not accept what the Pharisees

were saying. We observe this developing in John 1:11-12. When we get to chapter 10, we see the division in Israel. There is the Israel of faith—those that followed Christ, and physical Israel—those who would not follow Him. The blind man heard and followed Him, and he would not let the Pharisees separate him from Christ; so it caused division. God did not do something special for them in some special way. To read such into these passages is a mistake. They all alike had opportunity. Is God a Respector of persons? No! Has He ever been? No! Back in John 6, when Jesus began some hard teaching, some of His disciples turned and walked with Him no more. Jesus asked, “Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:67-68). Here again is the division that is taking place.

In John 10:5 the Pharisees became strangers. They will not believe what the Scripture says about Christ while others believed that this was **the Voice**. John was a **voice** crying in the wilderness, and he introduced another **Voice**. Christ was thus a stranger to the Pharisees. In chapter 9 the Pharisees tried to coax the blind man to say that Jesus was a sinner, and he would not do it. That would deny that Christ had just healed him. Jesus led this blind man out of Israel and would be one of those that would make up the church. Jesus is going to give another figure of speech.

“This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:6-7). Jesus now becomes the door by which they enter in. This is the emphasis of verse 16. In verse 8 those that came before Him were thieves and robbers. Who did this? The Pharisees! They, by hook and crook, took away the truth from most. John the baptist had asked, “Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come” (Luke 3:7). In spite of all that is said, the sheep did not hear Him.

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). The scribes and Pharisees were stealing, killing, and destroying. They did not go in, and they would not let others in. They tried to block the door but they could not. *To destroy* means the ending of the Jewish system in A.D. 70.

Jesus switches figures in John 10:11-12.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

The sheep belonged to God. The Pharisees tried to take over. They did not care about Christ. In contrast Jesus says that those who hear and follow Him could have life and have it more abundantly. Those that did not believe and follow Christ were lost. It is so sad that the religious world believes that national Israel is going to someday obey Him when He comes back to reign on His throne that they say will be in Jerusalem.

“For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25). Shepherd over what? The individual sheep that He would lead to the truth and finally to the cross. Let me ask: “Do we listen to strangers or do we hear the voice of Christ?” We need to have our ears tuned to what this Book says. When someone teaches something that is not from this Book, we must not hear his voice. Not only that, but we should then stand with Jesus and condemn such efforts. Jesus, as a Shepherd, entered the right door. He is the door through which they enter the kingdom. Then He is the good Shepherd that would give His life for His sheep.

In John 10:14 the people could have known Christ, but they would not know Him. In John 6:44-45:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at 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.

Notice that this verse states that *all shall* be taught—not just a few or *may* be taught.

“Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold” (John 10:16). As sure as the Father knows Jesus, Jesus knows the Father, and Jesus also knows His sheep. Now try to separate them if you can. The other sheep He has comes out of national Israel and the Gentiles. Beginning at Pentecost there will be other sheep. Soon there would be sheep from the Gentiles. These would form one flock, the church.

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God

in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Eph. 2:15-16).

Jesus died on the old rugged cross to become our Shepherd. I hope this helps us appreciate the 23rd Psalm a little more.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD OF PSALM 23

The 23rd Psalm is perhaps the most favored of the Psalms. While almost all people appreciate the Psalm, this author believes that many miss the true meaning. This writer believes that the essence of the entire Psalm is found in the first verse. Everything else in this Psalm is merely an elaboration on what is said in verse 1. We need to learn how to read the 23rd Psalm. The late brother, W. Claude Hall, under whom this scribe studied at Freed-Hardeman College, said that he could tell whether a person understood a Scripture by the way he read it. This is particularly true with this passage. The way we will study this Psalm will be with an emphasis on verse 1. “The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psa. 23:1).

What the Psalmist is here saying is that, because the LORD is his Shepherd, he shall not stand in need. Why is it that in this verse, as well as many others in the Bible, children of God are described as sheep? Why are they never described as dogs, tigers, or something else ferocious? Other animals just described can defend themselves, but the sheep are utterly dependent upon the shepherd. It was not fleet-footed and could not run away from animals of prey; so he looked to the shepherd for his care. This scribe believes this is the reason we are pictured as sheep, because we are totally dependent upon God for our protection. The shepherd saw that the sheep were well-fed, watered, and protected. What David is saying is that the well-being of the sheep was dependent at all times on the shepherd.

“I shall not want” for the good things of life because “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters” (v. 2). “I shall not want” for forgiveness of my sins for “He restoreth my soul” (v. 3). “I shall not want” for leadership and guidance for He “leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (v. 3). “I shall not want” even when I face the dark hour of death. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (v. 4).

“I shall not want” even in the presence of my enemies for “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou

anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (v. 5). “I shall not want” for what the future holds for “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (v. 6). “I shall not want” when I look into eternity for I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. This writer thinks we can easily see that all the Psalm is an elaboration on the first verse. The essence is “I shall not want,” stand in need, or lack any of these things simply because “the Lord is my shepherd.”

What does verse 2 mean in the life of the shepherd and the sheep? The shepherd’s duty was to take the sheep out in the day to graze in a place where they could be fed well. Sometimes a shepherd would scout out a place or land where they could go for pasture. This was the case in Plentywood, Montana, many years ago when this penman was there in a mission meeting. The shepherds searched for pasture to go to the next day or next week, being careful not to graze too closely to the fields they were using presently.

He calls his sheep in the mornings to him from the fold, and they start for the green pastures and still waters so they may feast on good things and have the right kind of nourishment. This is an important lesson for us to learn today. We are being taught, and this is especially true with our young people, that we have to turn away from the Lord to have a good time. Our youth come away feeling that they can go out and sow their wild oats, and when they are through, they can then come to the Shepherd. They think that then they will be ready to become a Christian. This is the very opposite from what the Psalmist is saying here. The Lord will provide for us the very best there is. The Christian life is the best life there is. We do not live the Christian life out of constant fear. While we do not want to go to hell, that is not the principle reason for living a Christian life. It is the best life and we have all the blessings and protection of our Chief Shepherd. We realize that we must obey the Gospel and live a Christian life because we do not want to be lost: We want to go to heaven. We all do, but this author wants to live the Christian life because it is the best life there is to live on this earth. In 1 Peter 3:10, Peter said, “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.” I love life in the Lord. I love the good days of life. I am so thankful for the good life I have had. I am so thankful for my good wife and our four children, their mates, and five grandchildren.

Life is so full of meaning and repose. I love life to the fullest, but I believe the way that I do because of my background and training way back at home. Sometimes we talk about the good old days. I enjoy thinking about those good old days, but I love today as well.

Green pastures and still waters are descriptive of the Christian life. There is no doubt that there is pleasure for the moment in sin. Remember Moses? Look at what the Hebrews writer said about him:

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Heb. 11:23-24).

He refused to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (v. 25). It is wrong to teach that there are no pleasures in sin. However, these pleasures are transitory. This writer has stood by the bedside of persons who lived in sin and regretted the life that they had lived. However, this author has never stood by the bedside of a single solitary Christian who was sorry that he had lived for the Lord! This, to me, emphasizes what these verses are about. Christianity has something to offer. Think of this! The Christian can look over the world and see temporary pleasure over there, but we have made a choice not to follow that path. The unfortunate thing is that the person over in the world cannot look over into Christ and see the fullest life that is filled with joy and peace. This is so sad, but it must be that way! They cannot understand the pleasure in righteousness that we have in Christ.

"He restoreth my soul." What does this refer to in the life of the shepherd and the sheep? The shepherd takes his sheep out during the day to pasture. However, at night he takes them back to the fold. There was a large enclosure where the sheep were safe at night from the beasts of prey. The shepherd is not behind them pushing them, rather he is in front leading them. Perhaps there is a little lamb back here somewhere that steps in a crevice of the earth and is momentarily trapped and cannot get out. The shepherd is at the moment unaware that one is missing. When he gets to the fold, he understands that one is lost. Most of the time they have names for the sheep as we did our milk cows. My first cow's name was Princess Ann. She was a registered jersey cow, but all our cows had names. We would call them by name even though we were milking two dozen or more twice a day.

As the sheep come into the fold, he realizes that one is missing. He closes the pen up and, perhaps by name, goes looking and calling the name of the sheep. “Where are you princess?” or whatever the name may have been. Makes no difference in a way about these physical sheep for we have learned that the Lord knows us by name. He retraces his steps calling the name of the sheep asking, “Where are you? Where are you?” Finally, he hears the bleating of the lamb and, finding it, he reaches down with his rod and pulls it out of the crevice to safety. This penman has been mistaken over the years as to the meaning of the rod and staff having always thought that the staff was the long stick of wood with a noticeable crook on the end much like a walking cane. This is incorrect for this describes the rod. The staff was a straight stick or piece of wood that the shepherd would tap a sheep with if he was getting out of line or about to be lost. He would take the rod with the crook on the end and reach down and get a hold of the sheep and pull it with that rod to safety.

In finding the sheep that had gone astray, the shepherd might take it in his arms and take it back to the sheepfold for “he restoreth my soul.” This is the way David describes this experience. This is true of the Christian life also. Sometimes we do, say, and think things which we ought not, and we realize that we are in sin. Sometimes one is completely given over to sin. This writer thinks there is a false idea that is propagated by the devil himself that God does not care, and He is setting on His throne just waiting for us to fall away. This is just not true. Our Lord is the good Shepherd. He cares! He loves us! He pleads for us! He sustains us! He is not a hard task master, but is rather like the shepherd that goes out looking for the one little lamb that has become lost. God is not happy if we wander away; He does not look forward to punishing us. Think about how that Christ stood over Jerusalem in Matthew 23 and would have taken the city under His wings as a hen does her chicks.

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.” We have alluded to this already. The shepherd had a call or a song that he would use. He went before them to make sure the path was safe and could hold them up as they journeyed along. Christ is our example (cf., 1 Pet. 2:21). We can be safe in doing and going where He leads. He has been over the road before. He has been tempted as we are—yet without sin. The Lord knows more about us than we know ourselves. Remember that verse

where the Lord notices even a sparrow that falls to the earth, and that the very hairs of our heads are numbered? That is more than we know! A sparrow might fall out of the tree out there, and we would not know about that, but the Lord does. Think about that! God knows that! He knows us so well. He understand our needs better than we know ourselves. “He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” It is in our best interest. He knows what we must have. The shepherd cares!

In the dark hour of the shadows of death “I shall not want.” Think about the Shepherd as he had led all the day. He has cared for and protected the sheep from harm. Now as the shadows of night start to fall around him, it is time to leave the mountains and return to the sheepfold where they can spend the night. The sun is sinking behind the western horizon, and it is a place of shadows. It is a rather darkened shady area through which they must pass. There were beasts of prey. He is watching out for the sheep constantly for he is charged with their safety. Out yonder is the growl of a beast. They hear that and are aware of that noise. The shepherd reaches over with that rod and taps them on the shoulder and reassures them of his care. This means much to them. Does it not mean more to us that our Shepherd, Redeemer, Savior, and Friend reassures us and steadies our steps as we go along?

This author wants to tell you that the Bible does not teach you that death is your friend. One might say, “Well, I am not afraid to die.” That is well and good, but death is not your friend! The Bible says that death is our enemy. What is the last enemy to be destroyed? “The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death” (1 Cor. 15:26). We must pass through death (Heb. 9:27). This scribe thinks what frightens us most about death is the unknown. This penman has never been down in that valley yet and does not know exactly what is going to happen, but “I shall not want.” Why? Because the Good Shepherd is my Shepherd, and because I have obeyed Him. He hears my call! He cares for my soul! W. A. Ogden beautifully expresses the thought in the song *Jesus the Loving Shepherd*: “Jesus the loving Shepherd calleth thee now to come. Into the fold of safety where there is rest and room. Come in the strength of manhood come in the morn of youth. Enter the fold of safety, enter the way of truth.”

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

GOD BEARS OUR BURDENS

PSALM 68:19

Garland Elkins



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INTRODUCTION

This author does not have just one Scripture that is his favorite for there are so many great Scriptures on a wide variety of subjects. However, on a specific subject, even though there may be many Scriptures that pertain to it, sometimes one of those Scriptures appears to stand out. When I think of bearing burdens for the Lord, and when I think of Scriptures that offer much encouragement, I often think of Psalm 68:19 which reads, “Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits, even* the God of our salvation.”

It is interesting how one may read a Scripture for years and never get the full significance of it, and then when one reads it again, it may stand out as a truly great Scripture. Such was true in my case. Many years ago while living in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, I was in my office studying from the book of Psalms. I read Psalm 68:19, and for the first time I came to realize just how outstanding this verse truly is. I called my wife and said, “I want you to listen to this Scripture,” and I then read it to her. I said, “Notice that it says that the Lord gives us ‘benefits,’ he gives us ‘daily’ ‘loads of benefits.’” From that day until the present the passage in Psalm 68:19 has been very special to me. I from

then until now have seldom, if ever, sung the song, “Count Your Many Blessings” without thinking of Psalm 68:19.

Let us examine Psalm 68:19 carefully, and we shall come to appreciate it even more as a great aid in helping us to bear our burdens. Again let us note the verse: “Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits, even* the God of our salvation” (Psa. 68:19).

“BLESSED BE THE LORD”

The Lord is worthy of our adoration, worship, and service. There are numerous reasons why we should say, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psa. 103:2). As children of God we should not blunder through life, as a blind man in an art gallery, never seeing anything to thrill him or to bring him to his knees in eager thanksgiving. Therefore like the psalmist we should take ourselves vigorously in hand, rouse our drowsy souls into wakefulness by this urgent appeal: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

It is a matter of choice whether we are **thankful** or **thankless**. All who really desire to be grateful can be. Just as one can, if he desires, deliberately cultivate the noxious weeds of hatred, malice, and ingratitude, even so, we can cultivate the opposite. Any person of understanding knows that there is no weed so poisonous that he cannot grow it in his own soul. However, there is no rare flower of gratitude that cannot be grown in the soil of one’s soul. Therefore, if we wish to cultivate the fine flower of gratitude, we can, regardless of what our circumstances may be.

The question is, how shall we go about it? There is something more involved in it than a mere saying of “Thank you” to those here and there who do us favors. It is proper to say this both to God and men, but we may do so, and yet be very poor in real gratitude. Our thanksgiving is too often from the lips only. But if it is to be of any real worth, it must be from the heart. We can do this by refusing to be forgetful: “And forget not all his benefits” (Psa. 103:2) The inspired writer of that statement does not ask that we remember each and every benefit with which the Lord has blessed us, but his request is very modest. In effect he says *think* and then you will *thank*.

But if we are to think in order to thank, what must be the nature of our thinking?

1. We are not to think upon our enemies.
2. Neither are we to brood over slights and injuries, perceived or real.
3. Nor are we to spend most of our time thinking about the benefits that have come to others. The Bible says, “The eyes of a fool *are* in the ends of the earth” (Pro. 17:24). It is possible to look at what others have to the point that we despise our own great blessings.

The way of gratitude, then, is not to catalogue what we have not, but what we have. As someone said, “The flowers growing by our door may seem meager at times, but there are always enough to make a lovely bouquet of gratitude if we only remember to gather them.” If we will take the time to think upon some of our many blessings instead of looking enviously at those of others, we will find ourselves grateful.

Not only should we be grateful, it is of great value to express it both to ourselves and others. To keep such a rare treasure shut up in our hearts and never give expression of it to others is to lose it. As we freely give gratitude away, it is not only as unwasting as Elijah’s cruse of oil, it even increases the more we use it.

There is another reason for giving expression to our gratitude, and that is because it is so encouraging to others. People need to know that, regardless of how small and insignificant they may be, we recognize and appreciate them. How much more smoothly the machinery of life would run both in the home and the church if it were lubricated a little more frequently and freely by that wonderful lubricant that we call gratitude. The day will come when our deceased loved ones cannot hear the complimentary things and loving things that we shall say about them. Why not say some of those things now when it would put a new elasticity into the step, a glad sparkle into the eyes, and make their lives much happier.

We should also give expression to our thanks because in doing so we gladden the heart of God. In other words, “Let the redeemed of the LORD say *so*” (Psa. 107:2).

“BENEFITS”

“Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits*” (Psa. 68:19).

The Lord bestows so many benefits upon us. He blesses us with many material and physical *benefits*. The most important *benefits* are

the spiritual. Everything that really matters depends upon one's being in Christ: this includes forgiveness of sins, happiness in this life, hope in death, and salvation in eternity. There are only two spiritual realms: we are either in Christ or in Satan (Mat. 12:30). We are in the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. There is no middle ground (Mat. 6:24). In Christ we have access to all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). This includes the initial blessings of: forgiveness (Eph. 1:7), redemption (Rom. 8:24), sanctification (1 Cor. 1:2), and being new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). It also includes the continued blessings of: cleansing blood (1 John 1:7), joy (Phi. 4:4), consolation (Phi. 2:1), and strength (Phi. 4:13). Then finally the ultimate blessings of victory (2 Cor. 2:14) or heaven (2 Tim. 4:8).

The greatness of these spiritual blessings in Christ are marvelous indeed.

“LOADETH US WITH BENEFITS”

The Lord not only gives us benefits He “**loadeth** us *with benefits*.”

The Christian is blessed with “all spiritual blessings in...Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

These spiritual blessings are as superior to the material blessings of life as: the soul is to the body, eternity is to time, the indestructible is to the destructible. This greatness is seen when in contrast we see those who are out of Christ (Eph. 2:1, 12). It is the difference between: life and death, riches and poverty, united and separated, full and empty, happiness and misery.

The blessings in Christ can only be enjoyed **after** baptism. Salvation is in Christ, but salvation follows baptism (Mark 16:16). Therefore, one cannot be in Christ until he is baptized into Him (Gal. 3:27; 2 Tim. 2:10). Freedom is in Christ, but freedom follows obedience to the form of teaching (Rom. 6:17). Therefore one is not in Christ until he obeys Christ in baptism. Newness of life is in baptism (Rom. 6:4). Therefore, one is not in Christ until he is baptized into Him.

If one dies in Christ he has the hope of heaven. The death of the righteous is the death of one in Christ. When life is over we must fall asleep in Jesus (1 Cor. 15:18). The dead in Christ shall rise before the living are changed (1 The. 4:13-18). Blessed (happy) are the dead who die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13).

Faithfulness unto death is necessary for the hope of heaven. “Be thou faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10). Paul said, “For to me to live *is*

Christ, and to die *is* gain” (Phi. 1:21). Why could he say this? He had been baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3) and he had abode in Christ (2 Tim. 4:8). Blessed is the one who gets into Christ, abides in Christ, and finally dies in Christ.

DAILY BENEFITS

“Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* **daily** loadeth us *with benefits.*” In another Psalm David wrote, “O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Psa. 34:3).

We are to pray to the Lord: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mat. 6:11). Also we must trust God to answer our prayers and to provide for our needs. The Bible speaks of *great faith* and also of *little faith*. This scribe would have an idea that the majority of Christians would find themselves somewhere between *great faith* and *little faith*. He wishes that all of us possessed *great faith*.

There are five passages that deal with what we have been discussing but two of them are parallel passages, so really these passages teach four lessons. The first is Matthew 6:28-34.

And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (ASV).

To be anxious concerning what we shall eat, drink, or wear, according to Christ is evidence of little faith. We are commanded to seek His kingdom first, and having done so we are promised that all the necessary blessings will result.

A second passage along this line is Matthew 8:23-27:

And when he was entered into a boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the boat was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Save, Lord; we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the

winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. And the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him? (ASV).

To be fearful in the presence of the Lord is evidence of little faith.

The third passage is Matthew 14:24-33:

But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, distressed by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night he came unto them, walking upon the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were gone up into the boat, the wind ceased. And they that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God (ASV).

To doubt the Lord's ability to care for us both physically and spiritually is evidence of little faith on our part.

The fourth passage is in Matthew 16:5-12:

And the disciples came to the other side and forgot to take bread. And Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, We took no bread. And Jesus perceiving it said, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have no bread? Do ye not yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not perceive that I spake not to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then understood they that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (ASV).

The disciples, like many of us, were still so materialistic-minded that on this occasion all that they could think about was bread. They had even forgotten about the five thousand and four thousand that He had fed. Their minds were on material things to the point that they did not discern the spiritual lesson intended. To have our minds centered on material things to such a degree that we do not understand spiritual lessons is evidence of little faith.

“EVEN THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION”

Now let us emphasize that last phrase of Psalm 68:19: “Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits*, **even the God of our salvation.**”

David lived under the Law of Moses but he knew that to be saved he must be saved by his obedience unto God. He also knew that one of his descendants would save the world, and as Peter so eloquently taught in Acts 2:22-38. Jesus Christ is that descendant: the Savior of the world (Heb. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Mat. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9).

The blood of Christ reaches back to those who died faithful to God under the Patriarchal and Mosaic Dispensations as well as those of us who live under the Christian Dispensation. The teaching of the Hebrews writer in chapters nine and ten is as clear and strong as language, logic, and analogy can make it. He says that: Christ offered Himself for our sins, purchased eternal redemption with His blood, and then with the merit of that shed blood went into the Holy of Holies to appear before the face of God for us; that the Israelites were cleansed from ceremonial defilement by the blood of calves and goats, but that our conscience—our souls—are cleansed by the blood of Christ; that **the Old Covenant**, the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry were sanctified by blood; and that likewise the new covenant and all that pertains to service and worship of God are blood-purchased and blood-sanctified. And he concludes by saying, “And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22—ASV). He also makes it clear that the blood of Christ was shed for those of the Old Testament as well as for those of the New Testament.

And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15—ASV).

The God of our salvation assists us in bearing our burdens. This is not done through a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. God will make all things work together for our good if we truly love Him. (Rom. 8:28).

There are different kinds of burdens. If we truly live the Christian life, we will be persecuted. “Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Burdens may come

because of ill health, accidents, et al. Some burdens are light; others are heavy. Some we can bear alone; others we cannot bear without assistance.

Some burdens we can bear ourselves. Paul wrote, "For every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6:5). Christianity is a religion of the individual. Therefore we must bear our own burden (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 16:22; 1 Tim. 2:19; Phi. 2:12; Rom. 14:12). By accepting his responsibility, one grows. He becomes stronger beneath his burdens. If one takes his talent and uses it, it multiplies in his hand.

MUTUAL BURDEN BEARING

Paul also wrote, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). There are some burdens that we cannot bear alone. We need the help of a brother. We should share one another's blessings, and also we should bear one another's burdens. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15). Our brother will some times have infirmities, and we, as fellow Christians, are to help each other. Paul wrote, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1). One of the many ways this may be done is by restoring an erring brother. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). Our grand purpose in this is to "fulfill the law of Christ," which is the law of love (Mark 12:31). Christ is our perfect example in this matter (Rom. 15:1-3; 1 Pet. 2:21).

GOD ASSISTS IN BEARING OUR BURDENS

Some burdens are too heavy for me individually, and for my brother. So these burdens we must ask and depend upon God to help us. God is both willing and able to help us: "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psa. 55:22). The Lord is our compassionate, loving, and sympathetic burden bearer: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). If we truly serve Him, He will sustain us. He will give us rest.

Come unto me, all ye that labour 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 (Mat. 11:28-30).

When the writer is faced with burdens, among other Scriptures, he often thinks of Psalm 68:19: “Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits, even* the God of our salvation.” Dear reader, this author highly recommends that you do the same.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

THE JOY OF WORSHIP

PSALM 122:1

Guss Eoff



Guss Eoff, Jr., was born March 7, 1923, in Fort Worth, Texas. In February of 1942, he married Lla Laline Norris. They have one son, Larry, also a gospel preacher. Guss began preaching in 1942.

Guss attended Pepperdine College in Los Angeles and Southwest State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas. He has preached for local congregations in California, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Missouri. He also has preached in over twenty-five countries and twenty-six states. He served as a missionary in Hong Kong for two years. In 1974, he went on a preaching Safari in Tanzania, East Africa, that covered 20,000 miles before he returned home. In 1995, he held his tenth campaign in Malaysia and Singapore and conducted a Soul Winning Work Shop.

He conducted the first television program for churches of Christ in Northern California and has conducted weekly programs in California and Texas. He also conducted daily radio programs as well as weekly programs in California, Oregon, Texas, and Louisiana. In 1997, Guss and his wife, Laline, moved to Llano, Texas.

INTRODUCTION

The Psalmist wrote, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of Jehovah” (Psa. 122:1).

What a statement! Let us hear it again: “I was glad.” What did the man of God mean by *glad*? The *Theological Word book of the Old Testament*, says of the Hebrew, “*samah, sameah*, rejoice.” It mentions the derivatives and says:

Sameah, joyful, merry; *sumha*; joy, mirth. The root s-m-h denotes being glad or joyful with the whole disposition as indicated by its association with the heart (cf. Ex. 4:14; Ps. 19:8 [H9]; 104:15; 105:3), the soul (Ps. 86:4), and with the lighting up of the eyes (Prov. 15:30) (2:879).

The Psalmist says that he was *glad*, he was joyful, he rejoiced, “when they said unto me, let us go unto the house of Jehovah” (Psa. 122:1).

It is interesting to note that “The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A new translation (The Jewish Publication Society)” translates it as: “I rejoiced when they said.”

GLAD IS AN EMOTION

Emotion is a part of the heart of man. This writer is not talking about the lobe of flesh that pumps blood throughout our bodies. It has no feeling or emotion.

There is a great amount said in the Bible about joy and gladness. For instance, when an angel of God appeared unto Moses in a burning bush, God spoke to Moses and told him to go and deliver Israel from the slavery of Egypt. Moses made excuses as to why he should not be put to such a task. The last excuse Moses made was that he was slow of speech. Jehovah told him his brother Aaron would speak for him. Consider what God said about Aaron.

And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is there not Aaron thy brother the Levite? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart (Exo. 4:14).

Notice that the gladness was of heart. “And the priest’s heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people” (Jud.18:20).

In 1 Kings 8:66, we read:

On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that Jehovah had showed unto David his servant, and to Israel his people.

How interesting to find that joy and gladness is a part of the life of the child of God. Hear the Psalmist again: “Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favor my righteous cause: Yea, let them say continually, Jehovah be magnified, Who hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant” (Psa. 35:27).

How long has it been since you heard the children of God shout for joy? Have you ever heard Christians shout for joy? Notice another passage in the Psalms:

Oh let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For thou wilt judge the peoples with equity, And govern the nations upon earth. *Selah* Let the peoples praise thee, O God; Let all the peoples praise thee (Psa. 67:4-5).

This scribe must mention these words: “Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee; And let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified” (Psa. 70:4). Hear again the words of the Psalmist: “Let thy priest be clothed with righteousness; And let thy saints shout for joy” (Psa. 132:9). Again in this same chapter: “Her priests also will I clothe with salvation; And her saints shall shout aloud for joy” (Psa. 132:16).

The only time this author has ever heard saints shout for joy is while attending a football game. Our team scores a touchdown and members of the church jump up and down and yell at the top of their lungs. He has never seen such emotion with reference to anything dealing with the affairs of the church. Why?

After all, we must be very careful with emotion among Christians. It can be a dangerous thing, you know. If we are not careful, we may be infected with Pentecostalism. This writer does not know about the reader, but he is tired of having denominations set the standard and regulate what happens in our lives and in our worship.

The Psalmist was not a modern Pentecostal! Yet, he shouted aloud for joy with the saints. It used to be that we would hear “Amen” from someone in the audience if they agreed with the speaker. No more! If someone “Amens,” every head in the auditorium snaps around to see who caused the commotion.

While this author attended Pepperdine College, Brother R. N. Hogan was invited to speak. The meeting was in the gymnasium, and the building was packed. Brother Hogan thanked those who invited him. Then he said, “I rightly don’t like to preach to white folks, cause it is kinda like preachin’ to a bunch of icebergs.”

Just because the Pentecostals have allowed emotion to run away with reason is no reason to allow us to kill emotion in our worship and service. We may get our hackles up, but most of our services are cold, formal, and ritualistic. Where is our pleading with God in prayers? Have you seen joy manifested lately? Have you seen sorrow? Have you seen any tears or crying? Have you seen any emotion manifested?

The words of the sixty-seventh Psalm should impress our hearts greatly. “Oh let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For thou wilt judge the peoples with equity, And govern the nations upon earth. *Selah*” (Psa. 67:4). Here again *glad* is mentioned. Those that are glad are to sing for joy. When we are glad, we are joyful, we are merry, we

rejoice. We read in the hundredth Psalm: “Make a joyful noise unto Jehovah, all ye lands. Serve Jehovah with gladness: Come before his presence with singing” (Psa. 100:1-2).

Of course, we do not know the hearts of worshipers, but we can see enthusiasm and excitement when it is manifest. The same is true of joy and happiness and of sorrow. So much of our singing sounds unemotional. Where is the feeling? The singing is lifeless. Do the words touch our hearts? Where is the gladness? Where is the joy? Have you ever wanted to shout: “Sing, brethren, like you mean the words you are saying?”

Who are you to judge? You do not know the hearts of the worshipers. That is so true! But, you do know a tree by its fruit. “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Mat. 12:33; 7:20). This writer can see the difference in singing in congregations, and he can even see a difference in songs.

Certainly there must be a difference in emotion at a football game and our worship, but there should be emotion nevertheless. We should be excited! We should be enthused, we should be happy, we should be glad!

There will always, no doubt, be someone who will be quick to condemn my observations as nonsense. Before you are so quick to put me down, be honest. Do not be argumentative! When our singing is slow, sluggish, and dragging, our whole trend is dull. Are you glad when we go to the house of the Lord? Do you get enthused and excited about praising God?

Let us consider the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 15. The younger son of a man asked for his inheritance. The father divided his possessions and the younger son left. He went into a far country and wasted his substance with riotous living. After he had spent all his inheritance, a famine came upon the country. This young son joined himself with a citizen of that land who sent him to feed swine. He would have been happy to eat the husks the swine were eating, but no one fed him. He then remembered home. He made up his mind to return to his father’s house. His father saw him coming and ran out to meet him. The father was moved with compassion. He ran, fell on his neck and kissed him. The father told the servants:

Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted calf, *and* kill it,

and let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry (Luke 15:22-24).

The elder son came in from the field and when he came near the house he heard music and dancing. He was jealous and refused to go in. The father came out and entreated him. He stated, "But it was meet to make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive *again*; and *was* lost, and is found" (Luke 15:32).

The father said, "But it was meet to make merry and be glad." What rejoicing! What emotion! "Be glad." Was this the same happiness, the same joy, the same rejoicing, the Psalmist describes in Psalms 122:1?

This scribe is made to wonder if this is the same emotion the seventy disciples enjoyed when they saw that the demons were subject to them. "And the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name" (Luke 10:17).

Peter describes the emotion of Christians because of their relationship with Jesus. "Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). The joy of Christians is unspeakable; it cannot be described. It is like the unspeakable gift of Jesus (2 Cor. 9:15). There just are not words to express the gift. Likewise there are not words to express the joy of the children of God. Such joy, such gladness, must be manifested. You cannot explain it in words, but it is expressed in our worship. This author realizes that emotion can incite fear, anger, disgust, grief, joy, surprise, etc. In this lesson we are only discussing the emotion *glad*. It is the state of the disciples when they saw the resurrected Christ. "And when he had said this, he showed unto them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20).

The apostle Peter gives insight as to the meaning of the Christians being glad or rejoicing. "But insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:13). Have you ever considered what emotional manifestations would be evident at the coming of Jesus? Football game excitement and emotion will be as nothing.

Jesus is going to descend from heaven. Hear how Paul describes the second coming. "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” (1 The. 4:16).

As Jesus ascended into heaven and a cloud received Him out of the sight of the disciples, so shall He come again (Acts 1:9-11). Paul said that Jesus shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. The dead in Christ shall rise first. Those asleep in Jesus shall hear the shout of Jesus and come forth. The faithful dead shall be first to rise at the shout of the Christ. The rest of the dead will not be in this first group. Apparently, they will come after the saints, but all the dead will be raised according to Jesus.

Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs 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 judgment (John 5:28-29).

Paul helps us to understand this event more in the following account.

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not 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” (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

As we look again at 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we see the dead in Christ shall rise first. In the next verse we see: “Then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 The. 4:17).

What an emotional occasion! The shout of Jesus, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. Yea, what a time to look forward to! Could this be the same kind of emotional experience that the Psalmist had when they said unto him: “Let us go unto the house of Jehovah”?

WHAT IS THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH?

The Psalmist speaks of his coming into God’s house. “But as for me, in the abundance of thy lovingkindness will I come into thy house: In thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple” (Psa. 5:7). Hear again his words: “These things I remember, and pour out my soul within me, How I went with the throng, and led them to the house of God, With the voice of joy and praise, a multitude keeping holyday” (Psa. 42:4).

Again we read: “I will worship toward thy holy temple, And give thanks unto thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth (Psa. 138:2a).

No doubt the “House of God,” “thy house,” “thy holy temple,” all had reference to the place of worship. It would be the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, mentioned in 2 Samuel 6. The temple was also called the house of God. “Now these are the foundations which Solomon laid for the building of the house of God” (2 Chr. 3:3a). We notice that the temple was filled with a cloud:

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of Jehovah, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of Jehovah filled the house of Jehovah (1 Kin. 8:10-11).

God chose Solomon to build His house in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 6:1-11). This was a material building of great splendor and magnificence in the city of Jerusalem. It was a great joy for the Psalmist to be invited to go unto the house of Jehovah.

Now let us turn our thoughts in another direction. The people of Israel did not keep their covenant with God. God was going to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It was not going to be like the covenant made with their fathers.

Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

This was to be a spiritual covenant with a new mediator.

But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, That I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and

with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers In the day that I took them by the hand to lead them forth out of the land of Egypt; For they continued not in my covenant, And I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel After those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, And on their heart also will I write them: And I will be to them a God, And they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his fellow-citizen, And every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: For all shall know me, From the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And their sins will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new *covenant* he hath made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away (Heb. 8:6-13).

Isaiah had prophesied concerning the new house of Jehovah.

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And he will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isa. 2:1-4).

This house of God was a spiritual house, a kingdom, for all nations to flow into. This refers to the church. "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

Paul helps us to understand more fully about this house of God.

So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Cor. 6:16).

We have seen that the house of God in the Old Testament was a place of worship. The Psalmist was glad to go to God's house. It was a great joy to the man of God to be able to worship.

ARE WE GLAD TO GO TO THE HOUSE OF GOD?

This scribe would like to share with you the apparent joy and gladness of a worshiper in Malaysia. A few weeks ago this author conducted a gospel meeting in Malacca, the ancient capital of Malaysia. One brother had his family with him every service. He was bubbling over with enthusiasm. This man was greeting and shaking hands with everyone who came into the building. He was picking up children and loving them. This writer noticed that he saw that everyone had a song book. This penman watched this Christian get all of his family seated and ready to start our worship service. He also gathered up several other children and got them seated and quiet. Each child also was given a song book. It just so happened that this saint led the opening prayer. He thanked God that our lives had been spared and that we could gather to worship. He praised God that he was allowed to hear and obey God's Word. No one sang with any more zeal and inspiration. Someone told me that he was one of the best contributors in the congregation, even though some others earned more money. This man had converted several people recently. He was a hard worker and managed a palm oil farm. This man confided that his greatest joy in life was attending worship services. One important point: he had to drive one hour and forty five minutes each way to attend services. He never missed a service. Here is a modern Psalmist who is glad when they say: "Let us go unto the house of Jehovah" (Psa. 122:1).

GOD GIVE US MORE LIKE THE PSALMIST

It tears at our hearts to see so many who claim to be Christians, yet they seldom attend services. Some only live a few blocks from the meeting house, yet they rarely gather to worship. They would never dream of driving an hour and forty five minutes to attend worship.

New Testament Christians met on the first day of the week to worship. "And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let

each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

The Scriptures inform us that the first century disciples met daily. “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved (Acts 2:46-47).

Christianity was a daily affair in the first century. “And every day, in the temple and at home, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus *as the Christ*” (Acts 5:42).

CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE GLAD TO WORSHIP.

What a blessing it is to gather with saints to worship our Father! We should be glad and rejoice at the opportunity. Thank God, we can commune with the body and the blood of Jesus. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16).

Our Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper so we could commune with Him.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom (Mat. 26:26-29).

For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord’s death till he come (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Christians should be glad and rejoice when they can sing together in worship. They teach and admonish each other, they praise God, our Father. “Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual

songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (Eph. 5:19-20). “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God” (Col. 3:16). “Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise” (Jam. 5:13). “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15).

Even in prison, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God. “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25).

CONCLUSION

As a child of God, what is my attitude when they say “let us go unto the house of God” (Psa. 122:1)? Do I dread to put forth the effort to go where the children of God gather to worship Him? Has my presence been driven by a sense of duty just because I feel obligated to be present? If I am not there, does my conscience bother me? Do I just go through the routine of worship? Is my worship service just a half-hearted effort? Would I really rather be somewhere else, but I am afraid I will go to hell if I do not assemble with the saints? Could it be that I have lost my first love, as the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:4)? Could it be that my love has waxed cold (Mat. 24:12)? If this be the case with many of us, what will solve our problem? It could be that we need earnestly to pray to God for a revival in our life. Maybe we need to talk with a group of saints that have the same condition. We may need a rededication, a pleading with God for help, and confessing of our sins. By all means it is a condition that needs immediate attention. God help us to have a yearning within our hearts, to be glad, to rejoice, to be excited, when they say: “Let us go unto the house of Jehovah” (Psa. 122:1). We will be glad to be there to worship, to praise God, with fellow Christians.

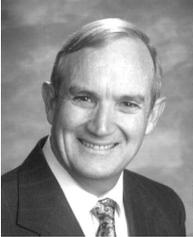
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“THEY THAT SOW IN TEARS SHALL REAP IN JOY” PSALM 126:5

Curtis A. Cates



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BACKGROUND

The title of this discussion is found in Psalm 126. The circumstances seem to be the return of some of the Jews from Babylonian Captivity, where they had been for seventy years. “For thus saith Jehovah, After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place” (Jer. 29:10). The first return from captivity was made possible through God by the hands of the one who defeated the Babylonian forces and declared himself “King of Babylon and King of the Nations,” Cyrus the Persian (A.D. 535). It was in his first year that

Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth

hath Jehovah, the God of heaven, given me; and he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all his people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Jehovah, the God of Israel (he is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever is left, in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill-offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4).

The leader of the first return to Jerusalem and the land of Canaan, the homeland, was Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2).

More than one hundred, fifty years earlier, God through Isaiah had called His servant Cyrus by name, numerous generations before he was ever born, saying of Jerusalem:

She shall be inhabited; and of the cities of Judah, They shall be built, and I will raise up the waste places thereof; that saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers; That saith of Cyrus, *He is my shepherd*, and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built; and of the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith Jehovah to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings; to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut: I will go before thee, and make the rough places smooth; I will break in pieces the doors of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that it is I, Jehovah, who call thee by thy name, even the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my chosen, I have called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me (Isa. 44:26-45:4).

As prophesied, Cyrus did indeed decree the return of God's people to their homeland. (Two later returns would take place in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, led by Ezra the scribe, and in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, led by Nehemiah).

PSALM 126 The Captivity

During the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, the exiles often sat down to weep by the canals, streams, and rivers relating to the Euphrates, that is, when their taskmasters eased up on their work (Psa. 137:1). They were in desperate, melancholy straits; their sins, wickedness, and rebellion against God had brought destruction upon their homeland and temple, death to many of their kinfolks and friends, and

their personal separation from the land of promise and from communion with God in His house. Their precious memories brought forth tears of sadness and misery. It was not ruthlessness and cruelty of their captors that stirred them to weeping; that no doubt produced resentment and anger. However, the remembrances of God, worship, home, and country touched the tender chord; their tears flowed like the rivers on whose banks they sat. It was hard to bear up when they "remembered Zion." They could only hang their harps upon the willows; this was no situation for joy (Psa. 137:2).

The very enemies who had snatched them from their homeland and had subjected them to bitter bondage now required them: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion"! This was but to add ultimate misery upon misery. "Sing to us about all that was precious to you, that of which we deprived you"; "they that wasted us *required of us* mirth" (Psa. 137:3). In other words, "Sing, and smile when you are singing!" Likely, this would lend their captors just another opportunity to mock their God and berate their faith. The Jews could not be a party to nor give occasion for such abuse of that which was holy and sacred; their unanimous answer was: "How shall we sing Jehovah's song in a foreign land?" (Psa. 137:4). To do so would be tantamount to forgetting God and His holy city; thus, they not only refused to bow to the Babylonians demands but stated that such profanation of "the songs of Zion" should bring their loss of ability ever to sing. There was much derision in heathen lands and much mockery from those who had a vituperative spirit toward the divine. The branches of those willows hanging down over the rivers were certainly reminiscent of the rivers of tears shed in sorrowful memory.

The End of Captivity a Dream

The Jews were captive in the strongest nation on earth: the Babylonian Empire. They were such a stronghold that the Jews must have wondered: "How shall we ever escape? In fact, the Psalmist records: "When Jehovah brought back those that returned to Zion, We were like unto them that dream" (Psa. 126:1). When they were on their way home, free from their taskmasters, returning to Zion, they just could not believe it; it was too good to be true; it was but a dream. Surely they were just dreaming, it was so seemingly unlikely and virtually impossible. However, great things are possible with God when

people humble themselves in repentance, as did the Jews from having departed the Lord to serve idols.

God's Deliverance from Captivity

“Jehovah brought back those that returned to Zion” (Psa. 126:1). They cried, “Jehovah hath done great things for them. Jehovah hath done great things for us” (Psa. 126:2-3). They could not have delivered themselves, and they realized it. God is the One who prophesied of their return, who raised up Cyrus and defeated Babylon by his hand, who told Cyrus to return His people and to assist in rebuilding the temple. He was the One whom Cyrus obeyed, submitting to God's plan of restoring the Jews. God had not wanted the Jews to have to go into captivity; their sins carried them there. Their sufferings were grievous, and they turned to God. He could then—and only then—turn to them in deliverance. The Jews did not all return at the time of Zerubbabel; others would return later. Most of the Jews never returned to Palestine from Babylonian Captivity. Those who returned successfully in the first group were an encouragement to those who would later return; the good news made its way to the other captives and stirred their hearts also to go back home. It was only through God's grace they were allowed to return; that it should happen at all was amazing to the captives. It was like being resurrected from the dead.

The Former Captives Rejoice in Their Deliverance

Those who escaped captivity gave great praise to their Father for what He had done. “Then was our mouth filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing” (Psa. 126:2). Those in bondage were now free; those who had wept by the rivers now laughed; those once ridiculed and scorned by their enemies were now emancipated; those so despondent in their desperation were now ecstatic in their songs of deliverance.

What God had done for the Jews and the resulting laughter was taken note of by the nations: the heathen. They also marveled that God had delivered His people: an event so unexpected and so unique. “Then said they among the nations, Jehovah hath done great things for them” (Psa. 126:2). The transforming deliverance was so marvelous that even the heathen had to acknowledge that it was from God.

Yet, the exuberance of the delivered people was tintured with sadness. Those who now had freedom and restoration could not forget those yet in the foreign land.

Prayer for Deliverance of Those Yet in Captivity

Those who had escaped the deprivations of captivity were grieved that most had not been delivered. Just as Ezra was much aware that but a *remnant* had *escaped* from bondage, those in the homeland (having been delivered by God) now cried out to Jehovah that He would “turn again our captivity” (Psa. 126:4); in other words: “Totally complete the work thou hast begun.” Their prayer was that all their brethren would return home from the many places in which they had been scattered, from Assyria to Babylon (all now encompassed within the Medo-Persian Empire). Indeed, representatives from all twelve tribes **did return** in the time of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:7; 1 Chr. 9:1-3; Ezra 2:70; 3:1; 6:17-18; 7:13; 8:29, 35; 9:1-2). However, most of the individual captives had not returned, which touched deeply the hearts of those who had been delivered.

Their prayer was, “Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah, As the streams in the South” (Psa. 126:4). The *Negeb*, Southern Palestine, during most of the year was extremely parched and dry (comparable to the hardships and deprivations of the Jews in captivity). The *wadis*, river beds normally dry during the summer months, indeed during most of the year, would be filled all of a sudden with exuberant, bubbling, bounding, mighty, life-giving, refreshing, rushing streams when the heavens would finally open and pour forth the precious rain. The bleaching hot sun had seemed to remove virtually all hope and life, and yet relief would come marvelously and suddenly to the land. When God’s people were in Babylon, it seemed that their hope and future had virtually dried up. However, the Lord marvelously delivered them, that is, those who would return. The prayer of the faithful was: Lord, help all our brethren return en masse, as the flooding waters rush through the streams.

Prayers Accompanied by Seed Sowing

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves *with him*” (Psa. 126:5-6). We are reminded of the assurances of Jehovah in Jeremiah 31:8-9:

Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth, *and* with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall they return hither. They shall come with weeping; and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters, in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.

The return to Palestine and the repopulation, rebuilding, and sowing therein was not easy; in fact, it was accomplished in tears, as well as in joy. When the foundation of the temple was laid, the younger of God's people "shouted aloud for joy," but "the old men that had seen the first house [Solomon's temple], when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice" (Ezra 3:11-12); the rebuilt temple would be very much smaller and less elaborate than was Solomon's. Very soon their adversaries wanted to throw in with them and come with a cosmopolitan, ecumenical religion. They said, "Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do" (Ezra 4:2). When God's people refused to compromise with the Jew-Greeks or Samaritans: "The people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia" (Ezra 4:4-5). Other threats and frustrations would include that mentioned by Nehemiah:

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I [Nehemiah] sat down and wept, and mourned certain days (Neh. 1:3-4; cf., 2:3, 13-15, 17-18).

Immediately when Nehemiah and his company began planning the rebuilding of the city and walls, the enemies' ridicule and mockery resumed (Neh. 2:19-20). The army of Samaria could not frustrate the work. God's people refused to bow to threats, never underestimated their enemy, made supplication to God, trusted in the One helping them, were properly armed (cf., Eph. 6:10-17), worked together in unity, never compromised, refused to become discouraged, and "had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). They refused to meet with the enemy in the plain of Ono (Neh. 6:2). It is certainly true that we are recognized not only by the friends we keep but also by the enemies we make.

No doubt it was hard, laborious work to replant the vineyards, rebuild the houses, re-dig the wells, and reseed the ground, especially when the seed was in very short supply. Likely, they often had to deprive their children of food in order to have the seed sufficient for sowing. And, if sowing in the midst of a drought, seeing little evidence of rain, was also especially difficult and productive of many tears; how would the seed germinate, grow, and mature of harvest? And yet, he persists in his sowing, drawing the precious seed from the seed-bag and scattering it in what he prays will be fertile soil. He must depend upon Jehovah to give it increase. The sower must do his part, else God could not give the increase.

Sowers in Tears Reaping in Joy

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy...bringing his sheaves *with him*” (Psa. 126:5-6). The sower of seed in the time of restoration was confident that Jehovah would bring him back successfully bringing in the sheaves, the seed having produced fruit. That joyful exuberance was experienced when the temple had been rebuilt! They

kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for Jehovah had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel (Ezra 6:22).

(Incidentally, at the same time they were rejoicing on this occasion, the city of Babylon was being burned.)

Additionally, there would be two other returns (as noted above): one led by Ezra in restoring the Law of God and the other led by Nehemiah in rebuilding the city and walls, with its streets and moats (in the seventh and twentieth years of Artaxerxes, respectively). The tremendous rejoicing which accompanied those additional returns in which many more of the Jews were delivered back home from captivity is described thus in Nehemiah 12:43: “And they offered great sacrifices that day, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy; and the women also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.” God’s law of sowing and reaping had certainly been fulfilled; He is Lord of the harvest. Every captive had the privilege and the ability to return to Palestine (Ezra 1:3); of their own free will (Ezra 1:3; 7:13), though not every captive chose to accept the gracious invitation and pleading to return from the lands of captivity and alienation. Nonetheless, those who did return and who

sowed the precious seed in hope were marvelously and richly rewarded.

LESSONS TO BE GLEANED

The Captivity of Sin

Just as the Israelites were in physical captivity in a foreign land because of their transgressions and rebellion against God: “All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Adam and Eve were created perfect and had precious communion with God; however, they violated God’s law (Gen. 3) and were thus separated from God spiritually by their sin (Isa. 59:1-2). Since that time, though we all were born perfect (we did not inherit the sins of our parents or of Adam) because our spirits are the offspring of God (Acts 17:28-29; Heb. 12:9), we all like sheep have gone astray when we reach the age of accountability. Most people on earth are alien sinners, never having through faith “obeyed the gospel” and been saved by grace (Rom. 10:13-16, KJV); they are thus lost in the darkness of sin and in the devil’s domain. Some, having obeyed the gospel, escaped the pollution of sin through knowledge but have again become entangled therein (2 Pet. 2:20-22). Their state is deplorable indeed, being worse off than had they never been saved by grace: they are apostates. Solomon correctly states that “the way of the transgressor is hard” (Pro. 13:15). Satan is a cruel taskmaster; he is man’s archenemy. Sin promises what it cannot deliver, and its *pleasures* are but temporary—the price to pay is severe, it is inevitable, and unless we are extricated from its stronghold, its destruction is eternal (Mat. 25:46; Rom. 6:23). Not only that, one misses the great blessings and wonderful joy which God has prepared in this life—and in eternity—for the saint. The slavery of sin, the debauchery of immorality, the shame and misery of wickedness, and the cruel persecutions of those who count man but a beast of the earth are indescribable. How could man possibly be delivered from such seemingly hopeless ruin?

The Marvels of God’s Love and Mercy

What a wretched condition characterized Adam and Eve when they rebelled against God and listened to Satan! What shame! What evident hopelessness must have filled their minds, their facing a violent death because of their sin (Gen. 2:16-17). But, praise be to God, the second person in the Godhood offered Himself to die in their stead and to pay

the grievous penalty for sin (Heb. 9:14). God began immediately to move toward Calvary (Gen. 3:15). He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16); Christ gave His life in our place while we were yet enemies (Rom. 5:8) and did “taste of death for every *man*” (Heb. 2:9). “Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15)! God sent Christ to “bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening *of the prison* to them that are bound” (Isa. 61:1; cf., Luke 4:16-21). Spiritual freedom is in Christ and by His grace through compliance with the law of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17; 5:17; John 8:36; Heb. 10:16-17); what a dream to be redeemed from sin and freed from its bondage—all made possible by the One whom we hurt so grievously by our rebellion and whose perfect law we violated. He gave His own Son of His love to pay the penalty we deserved to suffer and to shed His innocent blood (John 1:29; Mat. 26:28; Eph. 1:7; et al.) so we would not have to be destroyed forever in a devil’s hell.

Deliverance Through God’s Grace from Captivity and Destruction

When God gave His only begotten to die in man’s stead upon the cruel cross of Calvary, He put the message of redemption and the invitation of salvation in the most powerful medium possible—the all-powerful, all-sufficient Word (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; et al.). Can you imagine, dear reader, giving your child to die for others’ lives and placing the message of hope in an impotent medium, a dead letter, as some aver?

Note the drawing power of the message of the cross.

No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me (John 6:44-45).

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself (John 12:32).

Man cannot pull himself up by his own bootstraps; try it. Man also cannot pull himself up spiritually. Without God’s unspeakable gift and His Son’s blood of cleansing, man would be hopeless and without God in this world.

The door out of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, out of captivity into freedom, was opened on the first Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection, at which time penitent believers were baptized in

water into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 40, 47) and were thus born into the kingdom (John 3:3, 5). This door of salvation and deliverance from the bondage of sin would be/shall be open until the Lord returns (Rom. 10:13; Heb. 1:1-3); the invitation is to everyone in every age throughout the world (John 3:16; Mat. 11:28-30; Heb. 2:9; Rev. 22:17; Luke 14:15-24; et al.). It is possible for all to respond to the invitation (Acts 2:40; Phi. 2:12; Heb. 2:9; Rev. 22:17). However, as not everyone chose to return from captivity led by Zerubbabel and others, God does not coerce (nor can He) any to escape the terrible consequences of the bondage of sin. Those who have returned into sin's bondage, after having been extricated from sin through the blood of Christ, must return to the Lord through repentance, confession, and prayer (Acts 8:13-24; Jam. 5:16; 1 John 1:8-10; et al.).

Those Redeemed from Sin Rejoice in Their Deliverance

Those obedient to the Word on Pentecost and following “praised God” (Acts 2:47). The Ethiopian nobleman, upon making the good confession and being baptized in water unto the remission of sins, in obedience to the message of *Jesus*, “went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:36-39). The apostles “glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). The Philippian jailer, upon being baptized, “brought them [Paul and Silas] up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God” (Acts 16:33-34). Yes, their tongues were filled with laughter and singing.

Prayer and Seed Sowing for Those Yet in Sin's Captivity

Without doubt, Saul of Tarsus was utterly amazed that he could be saved, he that was “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8), the great murderer of Christians (Acts 9:1-2), the one who sought to “make them blaspheme” (Acts 26:10-11)! What rejoicing he must have done. And yet, think of the constant and deep pain and mourning he experienced because his own folks were still in the bondage of sin (Rom. 9:1-3) and of all the prayers he uttered on behalf of his still lost kinsmen (10:1-4). Like Paul, each of us should keenly realize that we are saved to save others; we are under the great commission (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47); what brought Christ to earth is our mission today (Luke 19:10). Like Paul, we must realize that we are *debtors* to

every creature, and that we must be *ready* to teach the gospel to those who need it so desperately (Rom. 1:13-15).

The seed of the kingdom is the Word of God (Luke 8:11), which we must sow into the hearts of men and women, boys and girls. We must “Cast [our] bread upon the waters” (Ecc. 11:1) and have faith that God’s Word will fulfil its function:

Giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

The sowing of the seed, the Word, has never been easy; it has been often accompanied by tears of physical suffering and/or verbal abuse. One has but to read of the journeys of Paul to learn that he was often beaten and under threat of death. The other apostles were beaten at times and commanded not to speak any more in the Lord’s name (Acts 5:25-29). They counted it an honor to speak in the Lord’s name and suffer for it (Acts 4:23-31; 1 Pet. 4:15-16). Not only was Paul greatly persecuted, but he also had “that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:22-28). They truly sowed the precious seed of salvation in tears, for they loved the Lord supremely and love the souls of all mankind dearly. Paul, as we should, desired that he have fruit among the Romans, as among the countless others where he had sown the seed. God said it would bear fruit (Luke 8), and it did—and does today!

God’s Fellow Laborers Shall Reap in Joy

Often, the apostle Paul thought of those precious souls he had led to Christ and out of Satan’s bondage, saying, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy” (1 The. 2:19-20). Looking on down to the resurrection of the last great day and the judgment, Daniel recorded:

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 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 (Dan. 12:2-3).

The Lord’s servant is one who “in meekness correct[s] them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance [cf.,

Acts 11:18] unto the knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him unto his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Notice the gratification when one restores the erring:

My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins (Jam. 5:19-20).

Those of us who sow the seed of the kingdom shall be rewarded, those sacrificing for the Cause shall reap spiritual things, including seeing many who become Christians and erring children of God who return to their first love. Indeed, we are assured that the joyful harvest follows the sowing. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them” (Rev. 14:13). The faithful sower and reaper “shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life” (Mat. 19:29; cf., Mark 10:29-30).

CONCLUSION

Knowles Shaw, songwriter, beautifully and eloquently captured the message of Psalm 126 in his poetry “Bringing in the Sheaves.”

*Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eves,
Waiting for the harvest and the time of weeping—
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.*

*Sowing in the sunshine, sowing in the shadows,
Fearing neither clouds nor winter’s chilling breeze;
By and by the harvest and the labor ended—
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.*

*Go then even weeping, sowing for the Master,
Though the loss sustained our spirit often grieves;
When our weeping’s over He will bid us welcome—
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.*

*Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,
We shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheaves.
Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,
We shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheaves.*

WORK CITED

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ACKNOWLEDGING GOD BRINGS HIS DIRECTION PROVERBS 3:6

Barry M. Grider



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INTRODUCTION

The student of God's Word must be diligent in his study (2 Tim. 2:15). This requires an organized system that is best suited for him. Also, it would be helpful for every Christian to set aside time each day simply to read and meditate upon the Scriptures. This requires a quiet place away from all distractions of family, friends, and work. One must also have a specific time to study, and try not to alter it.

The Book of Proverbs is worthy of our constant perusal. The pearls of wisdom contained in this rich and profound product of inspiration is unsearchable. Pondering the Proverbs will provide the proper direction that is needed in life, especially for our youth. If one studies a chapter of Proverbs every day, he can read through the book in one month, since it contains 31 chapters. What better way to begin the morning or close the day? Perhaps the guiding passage in one's life ought to be Proverbs 3:6: "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Sometimes we ask God at the conclusion of our prayers, to "guide, guard, and direct us." Is this just a trite expression that we have always heard, or do we really believe it? According to the

passage above, God really will guide and direct us. Often the Bible depicts life as similar to traveling down a road or pathway. Furthermore, one must choose the course that he will take. Isaiah wrote:

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein* (Isa. 35:8).

Jesus, as recorded in the sermon on the mount, declared:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Mat. 7:13-14).

GOD DOES GUIDE

The text under consideration declares that God does guide. Some who believe in the existence of God find Him distant, remote, and aloof to the needs of man. Yet the Bible does not teach this. God is not indifferent nor insensitive toward His creation. Again, hear Jesus in the mountaintop sermon: “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Mat. 6:26). Man is the crowning achievement of God’s creation (Heb. 2:6-8).

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26).

Even after man sinned in the garden, God came seeking to redeem (Gen. 3:8, 15). This love and concern God offers to every man. Yet, how many refuse God’s direction and admonition by turning from Him to live an aimless existence?

The text says God “shall direct thy paths.” God is pictured as a great road builder. He carves out the road, and makes crooked paths straight. Also, He is the maintenance chief of this road. We can arrive at our intended destination because He is preparing the way. You do not always see the road builder nor the maintenance chief when traveling down a highway in the United States of America. However, on the highway of life, God is always with us, giving guidance along the way. Notice the following passages:

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye (Psa. 32:8).

For this God *is* our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide *even* unto death (Psa. 48:14).

And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not (Isa. 58:11).

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).

The Bible is emphatic. God does guide!

HOW DOES GOD GUIDE?

God guides through His Truth. Notice again Proverbs 3: “My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:... Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart” (vv. 1, 3). Since God guides through Truth, it is imperative to understand that His Word is truth (John 17:17). How can we know God is guiding us? Perhaps we could examine ourselves by asking a series of questions.

First, do our lives conform to His Truth? “Let not mercy and truth forsake thee” (Pro. 3:3). While it is important that one know the Truth (John 8:32), it is just as critical that we live according to Truth. The writer of Hebrews stated, “He [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). James wrote, “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (Jam. 1:25). It is important that one take the Bible and see if his life conforms to its teaching. If not, one must make the necessary changes, or else he cannot have the guidance of God.

Second, is the conscience clean? The old adage: “Let your conscience be your guide,” is a dangerous rule to follow. The Bible is replete with warnings, such as: “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death” (Pro. 16:25). However, it is impossible to have a bad conscience and be acceptable unto God. Paul said, “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men” (Acts 24:16). Never is it right to violate your conscience, for to do so is sinful (Rom. 14:23; Jam. 4:17). One who continues to go against his con-

science will one day have his conscience seared (1 Tim. 4:2). If one desires the guidance of God his conscience must be clean and pure.

Third, what is our relationship to the righteous? Hear the words of the wise man: “So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (Pro. 3:4). These same words applied to the life which Jesus lived. “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). Having the approval of God ought to be our greatest desire in life. God is a righteous Being (Psa. 116:5). If one is righteous, he engages in right doing. God always does what is right. If we desire the favour of God, we must also be righteous in thought, speech, and conduct. However, if one is to be the friend of God, he will be the enemy of the world. James writes, “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” (Jam. 4:4). How then can we grow in favour of man? Paul, writing to Titus, said:

In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine *shewing* uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you (Tit. 2:7-8).

Furthermore, there are those whose respect we should desire—men and women of like precious faith. A man is known by the company he keeps. If our associates are Christians, then we can depend upon the guidance of God.

GOD’S GUIDANCE IS CONDITIONAL

God’s love is unconditional. “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). Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews stated, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). God’s blessings fall upon both the evil and the just (Mat. 5:45). Every good thing that happens comes from Him (Jam. 1:17). Yet, despite God’s love being unconditional, salvation is conditioned upon man’s obedience (Heb. 5:8-9). Likewise, God offers His guidance, but only to those who meet His conditions. According to Proverbs 3:5-6, there are three conditions which must be met, if man desires God’s direction.

In All Thy Ways Acknowledge Him

Acknowledging Him includes every step of the journey. Just as we must consult a road map to get to a particular destination, so we must trust the Bible as we travel life's pathway. Many times we stray from the right path because we do not acknowledge God. Who has not been talking to someone and yet not be heard? Perhaps the other person was watching television or reading the newspaper. Maybe he just had something on his mind and was not capable of listening. Far too often we get preoccupied and do not include God in our plans. Jesus spake the following parable:

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry. But God said unto him, *Thou fool*, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? (Luke 12:16-20).

Our Lord is speaking of a man who was totally preoccupied with self, who failed to include God in his plans. He was not condemned for being rich, but for **trusting** in his riches. A preacher once visited the home of a very wealthy landowner and farmer. The preacher commented how blessed the man was. The farmer responded, "I am not blessed, I have worked for all of this." What a pity and shame when a man fails to count his blessings. The words of those two farmers should have been like the Psalmist, who said, "What shall I render unto the LORD *for* all his benefits toward me?" (Psa. 116:12).

Abraham was so magnanimous in his attitude toward his nephew Lot. He said, "*Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left*" (Gen. 13:9). However, Lot made his decision based on covetousness. By refusing to acknowledge God, he paid a terrible price. The words of the apostle Paul were fulfilled in Lot's life. "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). James states the importance of acknowledging God, when he writes:

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that (Jam. 4:13-15).

It is important that we acknowledge God in every area of our lives. First, God must be acknowledged in our families. The Bible is a divine blueprint for happy, healthy, and harmonious homes. God is the creator and designer of marriage, yet His counsel is often not heeded. With regard to the home, God has said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). God hath decreed that marriage is a union between a man and a woman which is to last a lifetime. Furthermore, the husband and wife are to be one flesh, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Yet refusing to acknowledge God has brought devastation to the home. The feminist movement, the radical homosexual agenda, and a fifty percent divorce rate all demonstrate man’s downward spiral. Our young people often do not have moral and spiritual guidance and therefore have no absolute standard to help them determine right from wrong. It is not surprising, therefore, that teen pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and crime prevails among this misguided generation. Just think how acknowledging the following passages could alter our current demise and radically transform our families for the better:

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing (Eph. 5:24).

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:25).

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Pro. 22:6).

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right (Eph. 6:1).

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they *shall be* an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck (Pro. 1:8-9).

In John 2, Jesus attended a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Often, I ask a couple at the wedding altar, have they invited Jesus to their wedding and into their home? He will come in and make His abode, if we will let Him. The following poem is rich with meaning:

MARRIAGE TAKES THREE
*Marriage takes three to be complete;
 It's not enough for two to meet.
 They must be united in love
 By love's Creator, God above.
 A marriage that follows God's plan
 Takes more than a woman and man.
 It needs a oneness that can be
 Only from Christ—
 marriage takes three.*

Beth Stuckwisch Dicksons

Second, we should acknowledge God among our friends. Since there is a friend which sticketh closer than a brother (Pro. 18:24), we should be careful to choose the right friends. Paul stated, “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33). Often, by choosing the wrong peers, a young person is led down the wrong pathway. I am sure there were others who traveled with the prodigal down the road to the far country, and no doubt encouraged him in his folly. By selecting friends who share our spiritual goals, who stand ready to encourage and lift us up, we demonstrate our willingness to acknowledge God.

Third, we should acknowledge God in the workplace. It has been said, “Christians are the only Bibles some will ever read.” This is particularly true on the job. Those who know we are a church member and that we claim to be a Christian are observing us. If we acknowledge God in their presence, they will respect our honesty, integrity, and character, and in so doing glorify God. Paul wrote:

Servants, obey in all things *your* masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men (Col. 3:22-23).

Fourth, we should acknowledge God in the church. Denominationalists do not acknowledge God. Denominationalism is sinful and unauthorized by Christ. He died for His one true church (Eph. 4:4; 5:25). For the church to be that which is pleasing in the sight of God, it must be build upon Christ (Mat. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:11). Furthermore, the church must follow the New Testament pattern (2 Tim. 1:13) and respect Christ's authority (Col. 3:17). For example, since the New Testament is silent with regard to mechanical instruments of music in worship, those who use them refuse to acknowledge God. Remember these words of Agur: “Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto

them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Pro. 30:5-6).

Fifth, we should acknowledge God when we are alone. What we do when no one else is around will give insight into our real selves. Behaving with piety in front of others, just to be seen of men and to gain their approval, is hypocrisy. God knoweth the heart and he sees our actions—even in private (Heb. 4:13). Realizing his constant presence can be a blessing, or it can be frightening. It is important, therefore, that a man guard his thoughts.

Paul said, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phi. 2:5). He later describes the mind of Christ, when he writes:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things (Phi. 4:8).

If a child of God acknowledges his Father, much time will be spent in the closet of prayer (Mat. 6:6) and in meditating on His Word (Psa. 1:1-3).

“Trust in the Lord with All Thine Heart”

One who acknowledges God will trust Him with all of his heart. We are to trust him in everything. Trust is another word for faith. It is confidence in the character of God and a realization that He keeps his promises. Trust is based on knowledge. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). God is knowable (Psa. 46:10; John 8:32). Those who know God have responded to Him by faith. “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Notice, by faith one responds to both the promises and warnings of God.

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that *cometh* to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. 11:6-7).

The Bible is replete with examples as to what trust implies. Indeed, obedience and compliance are always essential elements of genuine trust. Hebrews 11 is God’s *Hall of Fame of Faith*. Those listed in this section of Scripture demonstrated their faith by **doing**. James writes,

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (Jam. 2:18). If we seek the wise counsel of someone we trust, we probably should follow what he says. It is with absolute certainty that one should acknowledge God and always obey Him. Even if common sense and facts do not always appear to harmonize with His Word—we should always stand on His truth. Why do some adjust and cope with the trials of life better than others? The overcomers have learned to “trust in Lord.” It ought to be the goal of every preacher to help his congregation know God better. Why did Jesus love God? He knew Him (John 14:31). Therefore, He trusted Him all the way to the cross.

“Lean Not unto Thine Own Understanding”

Lean means to “rest upon.” This passage teaches that one cannot properly conduct himself in this life without God’s direction. Jeremiah wrote, “O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Those who refuse to acknowledge God do not understand the true meaning and purpose of life. There are those who believe they can figure out life for themselves, and, as a result, they always do things their way. However, man gets in trouble when he lives life his own way. In fact, our way is what placed Jesus on the cross. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). From the garden of Eden until today, self management always leads to endless defeat.

Abraham and Sarah were one of the most godly couples in all the Bible. It seems, however, at various stages in their lives, they ran either behind or ahead of God, instead of walking alongside of God. For example in Genesis 12:1, we read, “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.” Could it be that Abraham was delaying what God had told him to do? Then there was the time when Abraham and Sarah were promised a child in their old age. Both of them, however, got into trouble when they chose to lean on their own understanding and wanted to assist God. Sarah sent Abraham into her handmaid, Hagar, and afterward she conceived and brought forth a son, Ishmael. Yet, this was not what God had in mind. Later, Sarah conceived and bore Isaac: the child of promise. To this day conflict still exists between the descendants of these two boys. All of this could

have been avoided had Abraham and Sarah not followed their own insight. Finally, in Genesis 22, Abraham and Isaac walk alongside God up Mount Moriah. They were leaning upon the Lord and were blessed for so doing. Each one of us should learn to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. 5:6), and not lean upon our own foolish and flawed understanding.

CONCLUSION

Yes, acknowledging God will bring His direction. He directs through His word. His direction never fails. “For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.... It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones” (Pro. 3:2, 8).

Those who refuse to acknowledge God sometimes will say Christianity is for weak people. I plead guilty! I am weak, helpless, and frail. Christians acknowledge God because they realize without Him how lost we would be. However, often those who need Him the most realize their need the least.

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD (Jer. 9:23-24).

Greg Nelson and Phil McHugh were right when they wrote:

*People need the Lord,
People need the Lord;
At the end of broken dreams,
He's the open door.
People need the Lord,
People need the Lord,
When will we realize
That people need the Lord.*

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

GOD'S WORD SHALL NOT RETURN VOID ISAIAH 55:11

Noah A. Hackworth



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Noah completed thirty years of work with the church of Christ in San Mateo, California. In 1996, he resigned the work in San Mateo and accepted the work at the West Visalia Church of Christ in Visalia, California. Presently, he is Co-Director of the Annual Greater Visalia Lectures. He has preached and/or held meetings in ten states. He has made two trips to Singapore and

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah the Messianic prophet recorded these words:

For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

Rain and snow return as vapour to the sky, but not without having first of all accomplished the purpose of their descent. And so with the word of Jehovah, which goeth forth out of His mouth...it will not return without having accomplished what Jehovah's counsel, or "good pleasure", without having attained the end for which it was sent by Jehovah (as in 2 Sam. xi. 22, 1 Kings xiv. 6). The word is represented in other places as the messenger of God (ch. ix. 8; Ps cvii. 20; cxlvii. 15 sqq.). The personification presupposes that it is not a mere sound or letter. As it goeth forth out of the mouth of God it acquires shape, and in this shape is hidden a divine life, because of its divine origin; and so it runs, with life from God, endowed with divine power, supplied with divine commissions, like a swift messenger through nature and the world of man, there to melt the ice, as it were, and here to heal

and to save; and does not return from its course till it has given effect to the will of the sender. The return of this word to God also presupposes its divine nature. The will of God, which become concrete and audible in the word, is the utterance of His nature, and is resolved into that nature again as soon as it is fulfilled. The figures chosen are rich in analogies. As snow and rain are the mediating causes of growth, and therefore the enjoyment of what is reaped; so is the soil of the human heart softened, refreshed, and rendered productive or prolific by the word out of the mouth of Jehovah; and this word furnishes the prophet, who resembles the sower, with the seed which he scatters, and brings with it bread which feeds the souls; for every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is bread (Keil and Delitzsch, 358-359).

The words of this passage are filled with meaning and have brought no little comfort to me through the years. At times when I felt my preaching was accomplishing very little, I remembered this passage in Isaiah. It has been a source of consolation. It has repeatedly assured me that the Word of God is doing its work even when there are no visible results; it perpetually has the influence of leaven (cf., Mat. 13:33). This passage has always been an inspiration to me to keep going, to keep preaching the Word of God with the full assurance that it will always do what it is supposed to do. The scope of this work will involve the “Context of the Passage,” “Passage Analysis,” and “What the Passage Has Taught Me.”

THE CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH 55

From the standpoint of heavenly invitations, Isaiah 55 is parallel to the teaching of Jesus in many ways. Matthew 11:28-30 is an invitation given by Jesus to come to Him and find rest. Matthew 22:1-14 contains the invitation to the marriage feast. In Luke 14:16-24 there is the invitation to the great supper, and a close reading of Isaiah chapter 55 reveals the fact that it contains an invitation.

Many titles have been ascribed to this chapter, but the one we have selected seems to emphasize its total context best. The Servant has come, providing salvation for the whole human race (52:13-53:12); the glory of Zion has been enhanced, the “tent” enlarged to accommodate a large influx of children, and Jehovah has received Jerusalem back as His wife (ch. 54) Now the Lord invites dispersed Israel and the cast-off nations to come and partake of the spiritual life which He has provided through the Servant. To limit this chapter to exiled Judah in Babylon, or even to give the Babylonian exiles major prominence, is to restrict the call to confine entirely too narrow. For chapter 55 foreshadows the invitation to come unto Him and find rest (Matt. 11:28-30), the invitation to the marriage feast (Matt. 22:1-14), and the abundant offer

of God's grace to Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:11). The invitation is both urgent and universal (Hailey, 451).

Verse 6 says, "Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." This phrase is reminiscent of Paul's comment to the Athenians in Acts 17:27: "That they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." In Isaiah 55:8-11, *for* is used four times to indicate why men ought to seek the Lord:

1. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah."
2. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."
3. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater."
4. "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing; and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands."

AN ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH 55:11

"So Shall My Word be"

My word means the Word of God: God's Word, not the word of men. To the Thessalonians Paul said:

And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, *even the word* of God, ye accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe (1 The. 2:13).

We today who revere the inspired Word of God are not alone. We stand in the company of some of the giant intellectuals of the past. "The Scriptures indeed are perfect, forasmuch as they are spoken by the Word of God and by his Spirit" (Irenaeus). "There is neither contradiction nor unreason in the divine sayings" (Methodius). "For the Lord is in the utterances of the Scriptures" (Athanasius). "In my belief not one jot or one tittle of the divine writings is without significance" (Origen). "Let this much be said on my part in proof that every syllable of the inspired utterances has its work to do" (Basil). "Let us therefore yield ourselves and bow to the authority of the Holy Scriptures, which neither err nor deceive" (Augustine). As the poet said:

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

Jesus Christ had an unprecedented respect for the Word of God. When He was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, He responded to each Satanic charge with a quotation of Scripture. When Christ was told to command the stones to become bread (Mat. 4:3), He responded by saying, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (v. 4). When the Lord was told to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, for the angels would deliver Him (vv. 5-6), He replied, "Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God" (v. 7). When the Lord was promised the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, He said, "for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (v. 10). The Lord provided a wonderful precedent for us by His respect for the Scriptures: the Word of God. Relative to the apostles, in His prayer to God the Father, Jesus said, "I have given them thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). The writer of Hebrews, probably Paul, said:

For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:12-13).

Relative to these passages Marvin Vincent says:

The form of expression is poetical, and signifies that the word penetrates to the inmost recesses of our spiritual being as a sword cuts through the joints and marrow of the body. The separation is not one part from the other, but operates in each department of the spiritual nature (428).

“That Goeth Forth out of My Mouth”

This expression is not foreign to Scripture; in fact, it permeates the Sacred Text. It is authoritative, unique, and original. In contemplation and expectation of a new name for the Lord's people, the prophet said, “And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of Jehovah shall name” (Isa. 62:2). In recollection of God's gracious dealings with His people, it is stated:

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live (Deu. 8:3).

In a life and death encounter with the devil, Jesus said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mat. 4:4). As Coffman said, “The Christian should receive as his never-to-be-rejected authority in spiritual matters, the word of God, the word only (Matt. 8:8), every word (4:4), and nothing but the word (15:9)” (38). In the Matthew 8 reference, Jesus, having come down from the mountain with great multitudes following, was approached by a centurion who had a servant who needed to be healed. Jesus said, “I will come and heal him” (v. 7). The centurion said, “But only say the word, and my servant shall be healed” (v. 8).

“It Shall Not Return unto Me Void”

There is no case in the Bible where the truthfulness of God's Word is more evident than in the case of Abraham and Sarah. God informed them that they would have a son (Gen. 17:16; 21:1-7). From the human standpoint it is inconceivable that a husband who was a hundred years old and a wife who was ninety years old would have a son. He considered his own body “now as good as dead” and the “deadness” of Sarah's womb (Rom. 4:19). Complicating matters even more is the fact that the *deadness* of Sarah's womb indicates that she never at any time had normal reproductive powers. Moses E. Lard says:

Dead, as applied to a living body, is a strong term; but it precisely expresses the fact in this case. As to the power of reproduction, and the word is used strictly of this, Abraham's body was literally dead. This power was wholly extinct in it. Whatever his body was in other respects, in this, it was *nenekromenon*—Perfect participle, and meaning, it had before died, and still remained dead (147).

Regarding the *deadness* of Sarah's womb, Lard further says, "The case of Sarah was that of a simple *nekrosis*; that of Abraham was one of *nenekromenon*. He had had the power of reproduction, and lost it; she had never had it" (148). If there could be have been justifiable reasons for doubting God's promise, Abraham and Sarah would have been justified. Instead, Abraham "wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20). God's spoken Word always holds true. The Word of God, when correctly taught and spoken, will never return to God empty or without results. Whether recognized or not, good is always accomplished when the Word of God is faithfully preached; we have God's own promise that this will be the case, and this is the case because God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2).

Near the end of His life on earth, while keeping the feast of the Passover, the Lord instituted His Supper. When it was finished, they went out to the mount of Olives, and Jesus said, "All ye shall be offended in me this night." But Peter answered and said, "If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Mat.26:31-34). Later, however, Peter denied Jesus before them all (v. 70). After the third denial, Peter remembered **the Word** which Jesus had said, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly" (v. 75). God's Word, respecting Peter, was not void. What God said came to pass.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to the virgin Mary to tell her she would conceive and bring forth a son whose name would be Jesus. He would be great, and be called the Son of the most High. He would be given the throne of His father David, and would reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there would be no end (Luke 1:31-35). Mary said, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" After the angel made an explanation of how this could happen to this young virgin, he said, "For no word from God shall be void of power" (Luke 1:37). For a virgin to conceive seed and bare a child is humanly impossible; so it is not surprising that Mary was bewildered when she received the news, but obviously all things are possible with God. When Joseph discovered Mary's pregnancy, he reacted like most husbands would: his intent was to "put Mary away privately" (divorce) to spare her of the embarrassment and shame that would inevitably follow. But the angel instructed Joseph to go ahead and take Mary as

his wife, because “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” God’s Word, in the case of the virgin Mary, was not void; what He said came to pass.

“It Shall Accomplish That Which I Please”

Jesus said, “And he that sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29). Man’s obligation first, last, and always is to please God. This is due to the fact that this universe and everything in it belongs to Him. It is His because He created it. He is “the God that made the world and all things therein” (Acts 17:24). God is the potter but man is the clay (Rom. 9:19-23). God executes His will as it pleases him. His Word accomplishes His own purpose. In the case of his selection as an apostle, Paul said to the Galatians, “But when it was the good pleasure of God, [it pleased God— KJV], who separated me, *even* from my mother’s womb, and called me through his grace” (Gal. 1:15). Regarding the conversion of Paul, God said to Ananias:

Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name’s sake (Acts 9:15-16).

Paul always knew the Lord was “standing by” him. On one occasion in particular when he stood before the Sanhedrin in self-defense, he explained that he was “a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees: touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question” (Acts 23:6). However, his audience was divided, being made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees with the latter in absolute denial of the resurrection and the existence of angels. The Pharisees found no evil in Paul, but a great dissension arose in spite of his efforts—so much so that the chief captain, thinking that Paul might be “torn in pieces,” had soldiers take him by force to save his life (Acts 23:10). Even though this brave apostle had faced death many times before, the Lord stood by him, comforted him and told him: “Be of good cheer: for as thou hast testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). What Paul faced in Caesarea was only a prelude to what he would face in Rome, but the Lord was *standing by* to nourish him and guide him in the right way. The apostle knew the Lord would keep His word, and so do we. Some sort of problem or difficulty challenges most gospel preachers, but God’s abiding presence coupled with the awesome power of His word enables us to fulfill our responsi-

bilities. For this reason we must “stand up” and never “give up” or “give out,” or “give in.” We must continue to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:1), knowing that God’s Word shall not return void.

Next, concerning the development of a *people* or *nation* through which Christ, the promised seed, should come (Gal. 3:19), Samuel the prophet declared: “For Jehovah will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake, because it hath **pleased** Jehovah to make you a people unto himself” (1 Sam. 12:22). There are several significant things that must be realized in connection with God’s development of a people through whom He would bring Christ into the world: (1) God chose these people for His own possession; (2) they were chosen to be above all other people on the face of the earth; (3) God chose these people even though they were fewest in number; (4) they were the objects of His love; and (5) He kept the oath he made concerning the deliverance from Egyptian bondage. It pleased God to take the patriarch Abraham and through his seed bring blessings on “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3). Moses declared:

For thou art a holy people unto Jehovah thy God: Jehovah thy God hath chosen thee to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth. Jehovah did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all peoples: but because Jehovah loveth you, and because he would keep the oath which he sware unto your fathers, hath Jehovah brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deu. 7:6-8).

Finally, respecting God’s pleasure or what He pleases to do in the matter of man’s salvation, God did not utilize the wisdom of men; He did not seek human counsel to effect salvation. Paul told the Romans:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him *be* the glory for ever (Rom. 11:33-36).

Today, it must be realized that we are men of natural knowledge; we therefore must remember that the knowledge of salvation did not originally come through natural channels; it was a matter of revelation. In an in-depth discussion of natural wisdom versus divine revelation, the Corinthians were told: “For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world

through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). It pleased God to save the world through the preaching of the gospel, the very thing rejected by men. It pleased God to put the "saving power" in the message, not the man (Rom. 1:16-17). Paul the apostle said, "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Cor. 2:14).

The natural man is simply the man of natural knowledge. The natural man is not the "totally depraved man" of Calvinistic theology; not the uninspired man, as such, as sometimes argued. The natural man is simply the man who depends upon natural means for his knowledge and information. We are all natural men—men of natural resources. The things of the Spirit of God are not to be received through the channels and resources of natural information (Wallace, 167).

"It Shall Prosper in the Thing Whereto I Sent it"

Of the several synonyms of *prosper*, the one best suited to interpret this phrase is "succeed." God's Word succeeds in the things for which it is sent. For example, there is the prophecy concerning the man called Coniah, and the throne of David. Coniah was the last man to occupy the earthly throne of David. The prophet Jeremiah said:

Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? is he a vessel wherein none delighteth? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah (22:28-30).

The prophecy is self-explanatory. Coniah would be the last one to sit upon David's earthly throne. Coniah was *childless* only in the sense that no one of his seed could prosper on the earthly Davidic throne anymore. However, Jesus Christ would by right sit on David's throne; but on the spiritual throne, not the earthly. Zedekiah, a son of Coniah, had no right to the throne. God said:

Remove the mitre, and take off the crown; this *shall be* no more the same; exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: this also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it *him* (Eze. 21:25-27).

The intensity of “this shall be no more” is overwhelming. It is a declarative that happened just like God said it would. Man may suppose, but God often disposes.

WHAT THE PASSAGE HAS TAUGHT ME

Romans 15:4 is an excellent commentary on Isaiah 55:11 and beautifully sets forth its application. Paul said, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.” The things written aforetime certainly embrace what the prophets wrote. The prophetic messages of the Old Testament cover hundreds of years and find fulfillment not only in the events mentioned and described in the New Testament, but also in personal life. First, this author has learned from the passage in Isaiah. It has been said that if we do not learn from the mistakes of the past, we are doomed to repeat them. One only has to read the Old Testament to see the mistakes that God’s people made and the severe consequences that often followed. So many of the things they did then, the church is doing now. We should have learned something from the actions of our forefathers: unbelief, the reality of apostasy, false doctrine, the consequences of sin, false teachers, murmuring and complaining, lustful desires, and fornication, for example. Paul poignantly said:

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 make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and perished by the destroyer. Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come (1 Cor. 10:6-11).

Next, the passage has given this writer a greater understanding of the nature of the work in which he is engaged. Gospel preaching involves working with people; a preacher has to be a “people person.” If one does not like people, he should not be a preacher. People have their “ups” and “downs,” they have their “mood swings,” they have their “attitudes and inconsistencies,” they have their “prejudices and idiosyncrasies,” and they certainly have their “egos.” Any preacher who is not aware of these things is doomed to failure. There are a few

unchangeable things in this world and human nature is one of them. We must expect people to be *human*. They are not perfect; they will not perfectly react to every situation, perhaps not any situation. Human nature is sometimes predictable; sometimes it is not, and we have to know which is the case.

The passage also teaches us to be more patient in our expectations. Many people do not act or react quickly. Sometimes they do not react at all. It takes time for Christians and congregations to grow. It takes a long time for some people to become Christ-like, and some will never be as Christ-like as they could and should be. This was a problem Paul had with the Galatians. He told them, "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). Paul was involved in a *patient struggle* with the Galatians. He had labored diligently to bring them to Christ. He had to watch some of them defect, and now he had to patiently wait until Christ could be formed in them. William Barclay has a significant comment:

In the end Paul uses a vivid metaphor. His bringing the Galatians to Christ cost him a pain like a mother's travail; now he has to go through it all again. Christ is in them, as it were in embryo. He has to bring them to birth in Christ (43).

Isaiah has provided us with the spiritual comfort we need in times of uncertainty and indecision. Whether a congregation is going to grow is a matter of concern to the local preacher until he learns that he is not in the business of "counting heads." He is, rather, responsible for preaching the Word (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Preach the Word definitely, but which part of the Word? All of it will be needed, but some of it more quickly than others. Preachers have to do more than quote Scripture. On one occasion a preacher allegedly quoted ninety passages of Scripture in one sermon. How can you make ninety applications? Every preacher has no doubt been uncertain as to what he really needed to preach at a given time. To ascertain this, the preacher must know his congregation and know their needs. In one sense perhaps it does not matter too much what subject the preacher preaches on as long as he correctly preaches the Word of God; but faith, repentance, confession, and baptism may not be needed every Sunday. It has been said that you can make a horse "want to eat" but you cannot "make him eat." We can make people want to grow but we cannot make them grow.

The prophet also provides us with a greater insight into the things of God. There are some things we simply cannot know because they have not been revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Word. In fact, the Holy Spirit does not reveal anything to anyone except through the Word. The great prophet Moses said, “The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deu. 29:29). Whatever has been revealed by the Holy Spirit can be known by all provided they are willing to *dig*. We have to be like the man who was building a house. He “dugged and went deep, and laid a foundation” (Luke 6:48). After a seasoned gospel preacher finished his sermon, he was approached by a younger preacher who said, “I would give half of my life to know what you know.” The older preacher said, “That’s what it cost me.” The Bible is the Word of God revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, but we have to “give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Speaking about matters of revelation, Paul said, “But unto us God revealed *them* through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10).

Next, the passage has reconfirmed time and time again that God’s ways differ radically from man’s ways. For example, God chose eight men to reveal, through the Holy Spirit, the New Testament. He did not make His choice from among the so-called *intelligentsia* of the times. He chose men, the most of which were considered as ignorant and unlearned (cf., Acts 4:13). God’s choice in this matter was to let the world know that the power was not in the man, but in his message, which is no doubt the reason that Paul said, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves” (2 Cor. 4:7). This is precisely the reason why an audience needs to concentrate on falling in love with the gospel that is preached, not the one who preached it. Paul also said, “What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him” (1 Cor. 3:5).

The passage reassures us that it is God who works in us “both to will and to work, for his good pleasure” (Phi. 2:13). It repeatedly brings to our attention the fact that God is the potter and we are the clay (Rom. 9:20-21). It is our responsibility to make ourselves available to

Him. To fight against God (Acts 5:39) is not an option. We cannot therefore find out the *why* of God's actions unless He sees fit to tell us. Our life is an instrument in His hands. He has the right to mold us and shape us as He desires. Our life is not the real light; we reflect His glory. Jesus said, "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mat. 5:16).

CONCLUSION

Jehovah God is in charge of the universe and everything in it, including man himself. God did not create the universe and then "turn his back" on it to allow it to run by itself. God created man and the universe for a purpose. He administers the affairs of the world and regulates the activities of men. He accomplishes His purpose in the things He does. His Word will accomplish His Will. It will prosper in the thing whereunto He sent it. Hence Isaiah 55:11 has long been a source of genuine comfort and encouragement to this scribe. It tells me God is in charge.

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“HE SHALL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS” MATTHEW 1:21

Robert Patterson



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INTRODUCTION

It has been said, “The Bible is, among other things, a handbook on man’s salvation.” Truly:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Since that is so, then the Bible furnishes man with the needed information concerning his relationship to God, and the need to make changes in that relationship wherein man is able to enjoy fellowship with God and be within His benefits and blessings.

With this in mind, when Joseph discovered Mary’s condition (Mat. 1:18), it is no wonder that he “was minded to put her away privily” (Mat. 1:19). While Joseph thought on these things an angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph with the astounding proclamation: “fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (Mat. 1:20). This information precedes one of the great encouraging statements of the Bible. In Matthew 1:21 we read, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” In this verse we should

notice that: (1) the child to be born would be a son; (2) Joseph was to name Him *Jesus*; and (3) He would be the deliverer of His people!

This encouraging statement concerning the promise that a Savior would be sent implies that man was (and is) in need of such. If that need was not present, then neither the Bible nor the Christ would be available or necessary. However, since man is responsible and accountable before God, and will one day stand before Him to give an account (Ecc. 12:13-14; Mat. 25:31-46; Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10), thus whatever things are needed to prepare men for that accounting must be utilized by mankind. Based upon the encouraging statement of Matthew 1:21: "He shall save his people from their sins," we now want to turn our attention to the sending of this Savior noticing several different points.

WHY DOES MAN NEED A SAVIOR?

Simply put, man's fundamental problem is sin! Sin is the transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). For transgression to take place man must have the ability to violate God's will, which supports the biblical truth that man possesses freedom of will. This point can be readily seen and verified by noting man in the garden, with God speaking of areas of restriction and areas of liberty (Gen. 2:16-17). After God gave His instructions to man in Genesis 2, we find in the early verses of chapter three the sin of Adam and Eve, and thus sin's entrance into the world through this transgression. Man had been told that death (separation from God) would result because of his violation of God's law (Gen. 2:17), and more than that, physical death was also a consequence of sin since man was banished from the garden and no longer had access to the tree of life (Gen. 3:23-24). Truly, for those in Christ, one of the great blessings of Heaven is that it is a place where we will once again have access to the tree of life (Rev. 22:14). However, sin **is** in the world: and "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23)!

GOD'S PROMISE OF A SAVIOR

As we read of the tragedy of the garden in Genesis 3, not only do we have the record of the sin committed and the consequences of sin, but God's message to the serpent was this: "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" (Gen. 3:15). Here

we have the first promise of deliverance. A *seed* of woman is mentioned in terms of *he*, and this one, even though He will suffer a hurtful blow (upon the heel) will administer a death blow (to the head) of sin! What a marvelous picture we are presented concerning the work of the coming Savior, and thus, a glimmer of hope for sinful man. As one continues in the Word of God we find these other Old Testament passages:

Promise To Abraham

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

Here is the promise given to Abraham, that in him (in his seed) all the families of the earth would be blessed. The lineage from Abraham through his son Isaac brought forth the Jewish nation. It should be noted that Jesus came from this nation of the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). To preserve the seed line, and to insure that Jesus would be born of those who believed in and served Almighty God, the Jews were given a separate law (Gal. 3:16-24).

The Branch

We have the sons of Jacob brought before him that they might receive the father's blessings, and concerning Judah the statement is:

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*” (Gen. 49:10).

Judah is said to be the tribe bringing forth a *scepter* (the instrument of reign, the instrument of the rule). Judah is also identified as that tribe from which a *lawgiver* (ruler, reigner) would come. Thus, from Judah one holding the *scepter* of rule would come, and the people would be gathered unto Him. The Hebrews writer describes the fact that Jesus “sprang out of Juda,” and for Him to reign as our priest there “is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12-14). Simply put, there had to be a change of the law in order for Jesus Christ to serve as high priest since He was from the tribe of Judah.

God's Prophet

God's promise to Moses and children of Israel is:

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require *it* of him (Deu. 18:18-19).

God makes this promise concerning One to come after Moses of their number who would be like Moses: *a Prophet* (Mat. 13:57; 21:11; Luke 13:32-33). This Prophet will speak for God (John 12:48-50) and thus have authority (Mat. 28:18-20). God will penalize those who reject His authority (Mat. 25:31-46; John 5:22, 25-29; Acts 17:31; 2 The. 1:5-10). Here is the promise of *a Prophet* (in so many ways like unto Moses) sent from God to be a Deliverer, a Lawgiver, a Mediator between God and man. It is a prophecy concerning the Christ!

The Virgin Birth

The virgin birth shall be a sign:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

Isaiah's prophecy provides for us the particular nature of the Lord's birth. Matthew cites the fulfilment of this prophecy which is the basis of our current study (Mat. 1:21-23) concerning the virgin born *Son* who was to be called *Jesus* (God is salvation) or *Emmanuel* (God with us) who would be the Deliverer of His people from Satan's control. How fitting that John records, "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:14). Isaiah 7:14 indicates the miraculous nature of the Lord's birth and His Deity.

A Child Is Born

Isaiah provides more information concerning the promise of this One to be born:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

It should be noted that not only do we have the promise of the Christ, but also that He is Deity (Mat. 1:23; John 1:1-2, 14; 14:8-10; 17:21-22; Rom. 1:3-4; Phi. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-3). In His name, His position, in His authority, there will be something wonderfully brought to mankind. He was to be a counsellor, a teacher, a guide, and an instructor. He, Himself, would partake of Deity and would be called *everlasting Father*.

His would be a reign of peace, and thus, He would be known as the *Prince of Peace*.

One cannot help but notice that as the Old Testament message unfolded, there was more and more information given concerning the coming of Jesus. Sufficient details and information were given that the fulfillment would be without question. Nothing was left to question concerning the identity and purpose of the coming of Jesus.

THE PROMISED SAVIOR COMES

In Isaiah 7:14 we have the promise of the Lord's virgin birth, and we have seen that Matthew made known the fulfillment of this promise (Mat. 1:22-23). In that same context of Matthew 1, we also find additional information given which expresses the purpose of the Lord's coming into the world. Certainly, Matthew 1:21 would have to be considered one of the great encouraging statements of the Bible when Joseph is informed concerning Mary: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Thus, the time prophesied of, longed for, looked for, had arrived. All of the prophecies, Scriptures, and promises concerning the Savior of the world was at hand! Paul wrote, "But when the fulness of the 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" (Gal. 4:4-5). God's "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:10-11), which was planned "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4-6), involved the sending of His Son. These are verses which inform us of the eternal existence of Christ (He had to be somewhere else first before He could be *sent*), His humanity (the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 7:14), and that His coming would have a redemptive purpose (Tit. 2:14). Thus, we are informed that He would be called *Jesus* (Jehovah is salvation), and why He would be called such: "for [the reason] he shall save his people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21).

At the birth of the Lord, when an angel appeared unto the shepherds, the announcement was made unto them: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

JESUS CAME TO DEAL WITH SATAN AND SIN

When God addresses Satan and sin, He speaks of the *enmity* and the *bruising* of Satan's head (Gen. 3). We now have the announcement that Jesus "shall save his people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21). What about that work? We now have the test. When we see what was promised in Genesis 3, does this *Savior* do anything that will relieve man concerning the Satan and sin problem? Let us notice some things concerning both of them.

Jesus declares that He is going to be *lifted up* (while specifically referencing the type of death He would die, also indicates His resurrection from the earth and ascension into heaven) *from the earth* (John 12:31-32). He also informs us that "**now** shall the prince of this world be cast out." When? "**Now** is the judgment of this world: [and] **now** shall the prince of this world be cast out." Jesus will die upon the cross which will nullify, bring to an end, or make Satan impotent (as far as holding that ruling and reigning power over man through sin any longer). He is *cast out*!

John speaks concerning the Christ and His relationship to the devil: "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" (1 John 3:8). Now, let us not be mistaken: the devil still lives; he still has work. The devil still has his effect upon men. However, any man **at will** can break that hold, that rule, that influence, and thus no longer be under the dominion of Satan and sin! One can do so by his obedience to the gospel of Christ. In destroying the devil (his works, hold, and bondage), then sin itself is destroyed. Paul writes, "And you *hath he quickened* [made alive—those who have obeyed the gospel], who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). *Death* means "separation." This is true in every application of the word. It means separation in terms of physical death, because in physical death there is the separation of the spirit from the body (Ecc. 12:7; Jam. 2:26). It means it in terms of man being sent away from God in the judgment, because eternal death is to be away from God forever (Mat. 25:41, 46; John 5:28-29; 2 The. 1:5-9). Also you have those who are still alive but spiritually dead—living a life of sin. Paul said that you "were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). In the long ago, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to tell His people who were no longer being blessed as they had earlier been and as they

wanted to be, just why this was the case. If they had any doubt as to what the problem was, then Isaiah set them straight. On this occasion, Isaiah informs them:

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Notice: "your iniquities [sins] have separated between you and your God!" Thus, the coming of the Savior! The coming of the Saviour to die! The coming of the Savior to shed that blood, because God had long established the principle that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). Jesus came, then, to benefit man in the shedding of His own blood (Heb. 9:12). There was, indeed, significance in John referring to Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). Isaiah had pictured the Christ, the Savior, in such terms when he said that He would be a suffering Savior who would be persecuted and put to death. Isaiah informs us: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isa. 53:3-10). In the announcement of John in identifying Jesus as being "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36), He is unlike any lamb that this world has seen before, and He will die a death that had a power unlike any other death that has ever taken place! As Jesus approached the cross and knowing of the blood He would shed there, He gave His disciples a *supper* to be observed in the kingdom (Mat. 26:26-29). Two elements made up that supper (the Lord's Supper): bread which represents His body, and the fruit of the vine which represents His blood (Mat. 26:26, 29). Concerning the cup the Lord said, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat. 26:28).

Thus, we have the New Testament order of things, made possible through His shed blood. We have the remission of sins available because of Christ's blood. Paul said, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). With the death of the Christ, the Savior of the world, there is the birth of the gospel in its power to save men. At the end of His ministry, and prior to His ascension to be with the Father, Jesus commanded the disciples: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the

gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). The gospel of Christ is to be published, made known, preached, and taught to all men everywhere (Mat. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8), for "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). The gospel is God's power to save lost men, and all men are expected to render obedience to it!

CONCLUSION

How thankful we should be for God's full and complete revelation to man—the Bible! How thankful we should be that we have so many instances in the New Testament letters referring to the Christ, to the things that He accomplished, and concerning the things that He said. How thankful we should be for Christ being mentioned and being involved in Old Testament events and circumstances, and also being mentioned so often in prophecy. Not only that, but also thankful for the information given us in the Old and New Testaments concerning Christ in His preexistence, so we will be able to borrow the words from one in the New Testament who said, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mat. 27:54). Then Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mat.16:16). Thomas, after looking at Him said, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

In Matthew 1:21 we have the promise of a Savior: "He shall save his people from their sins," which shows the need of a Savior. Man can have his salvation when man, himself, recognizes that. We saw the early promise of the Savior, that promise dwelt upon, embellished, talked about, and prophesied about through the history of the nation of Israel and which is recorded for our study. However, it is in Matthew 1 where Joseph is informed:

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Mat. 1:22-23).

God was telling Joseph that **the time has come**, and **this is that** which was spoken by the prophet concerning a *virgin* being with child, and shall "bring forth a son." Joseph, Mary shall "bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21). The point is made in the old familiar song: "Soul a

Saviour thou art needing.” How thankful we should be that the Savior has come and has taken His action, so we can be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb through our obedience to His will. Truly: “Thanks *be* unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:1 5).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

INHERIT THE KINGDOM

MATTHEW 25:34

Joel Wheeler



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INTRODUCTION

The inspired Word of God is filled with hope and encouragement from Genesis to Revelation. No other book upon the face of the earth can encourage and strengthen as what the Word of God does. If man compiled all of his philosophies into one single volume, it could not produce the same happiness and strength that is found in the Bible. Often, writers quote the inspired Word of God to strengthen the weak and encourage the faint hearted. Encouraging statements of the Bible serve a multi-purpose task.

First, they **give strength in a time of despair**. Even as king David wrote of his tribulations and trials in Psalm 22, he was strengthened and encouraged when he wrote, "The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psa. 23:1). At the lowest period in the life of David, he found strength in the encouraging statement. Second, they **benefit God's children in every generation**. Just as David receive strength when he wrote the twenty-third Psalm, millions upon millions have been strengthened in the Lord's church in the twenty-first century. Psalm 23

is the most quoted chapter in all the Bible because of the encouragement it gives in time of grief and sorrow. People in every generation have turned to the written Word of God for encouragement in times of sickness, death, affliction, persecution, and temptation.

One of the greatest encouraging statements that was ever conveyed was given by the Lord Himself. Christians are merely pilgrims and strangers upon this frail and sin-sick earth. Peter said, “Beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). What greater encouragement could one receive as to hear the final blessing of the long journey. In this encouraging statement Jesus said, “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” (Mat. 25:34). What makes this such a great encouraging statement? It is encouraging for many reasons.

BECAUSE OF THE GREAT SEPARATION

Christians are encouraged because of the great separation that will take place on the day of Judgment. When time is no more, every man and every woman from all nations will stand before the Lord. Jesus said:

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).

In Palestine, the sheep and the goats pastured together, and it was nearly impossible to keep them separated. Throughout history, the good and the bad have been mixed with unsuccessful separation. Just as the tares and the wheat are mixed, so are the sheep and goats. Here is the final and great separation between sheep (the good) and goats (the bad). It is only the great Shepherd that can separate these two groups in their right places. Before the great King all nations will stand before Him to await their final judgement. Those that will stand before Him will be the diligent and the slothful, the wise and the foolish, the obedient and lawless. Only Christ will be able to separate them because He knows their deeds and their hearts. The Hebrews writer said, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).

BECAUSE OF THE KING

Christians are encouraged because of the righteous and holy King judging the world. Matthew 25 is a very serious picture that we are given by inspiration concerning the great day of judgment. The King of kings (Rev. 17:14; 19:16) is sitting on upon His righteous throne of judgment (Mat. 25:32). Our Lord and Savior is not only a king, but he is the King above all kings. Many great kings have ruled on the earth, yet there is none that can compare to the Lord Himself.

David, whom God called “a man after mine own heart” (Acts 13:22), could not deliver righteous judgment upon his people. David was great a king, but he sinned terribly against Uriah, Bathsheba, and God. Although David conquered the Philistines, Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites, Moabites, and many other nations, he still sinned. King Solomon was endowed with great wisdom from on high (1 Kin. 3:9), yet he was foolish as he sought the ways of the world. The Hebrews writer refers to Melchizedek as “the king of Salem” or king of peace (Heb. 7:1-2). He was a type of Christ because of his priesthood and kingship. Melchizedek was a great character of the Old Testament Scriptures, but he cannot be our judge and savior.

BECAUSE OF THE KINGDOM

The establishment of the kingdom was prophesied throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. The prophecy that Daniel spoke was of an invincible kingdom that could never be destroyed by man or Satan. This indestructible kingdom would break into pieces the kingdoms of men (Dan. 2:44). No other kingdom has been able to stand the test of time. Kingdoms of men have come and gone, but the kingdom of God is forever. Seven hundred years before the kingdom of God was established, the prophecy was made of an eternal and everlasting kingdom. The inspired statesman of Israel wrote:

Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:7).

One year before the Lord was crucified, He promised to give the “keys of the kingdom” to Peter in Matthew 16 and later to all the apostles (John 20:21-23). The establishment of the eternal kingdom of God would come about on Pentecost in A.D. 33 (Acts 2). The Lord commissioned the apostles to open the doors of the kingdom to the

Jews which also would accept all races of people. Jesus revealed the nature of this kingdom when He said, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36). The death of Jesus would not keep the kingdom from being established and coming into existence (Mat. 16:18). One must realize that the King is eternal and so is His kingdom.

BECAUSE OF THE FATHER

Christians are encouraged because of the Heavenly Father. Jesus said, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Mat. 6:9). Jesus often referred to the Almighty God in heaven as *Father* (Mat. 5:48; 6:14, 32; John 17:1; et al). Matthew records Jesus saying, “And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven” (Mat. 23:9). Men endow themselves with titles of glory and honor in matters of religion. Jesus condemns this kind of self-glory by saying there is only one Father.

Father shows terms of endearment and love. The apostle John wrote, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1). Almighty God is also our heavenly Father. The relationship that a Christian possesses with God is one of a caring Father, and He is not unmerciful to His children. God cared for Israel as did a father for his children. He brought them out of a severe affliction in Egypt and led them to the land flowing with milk and honey. He saved them from the sword of Pharaoh by bringing them to safety through the Red Sea on dry ground. The Psalmist wrote, “But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy *endureth* for ever” (Psa. 136:15). At a time when Israel was in despair, God saved them by His wondrous power and might.

Moses, the great leader of Israel wrote:

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God (Psa. 90:1-2).

The very nature of God is eternal.

The world cannot refer to God as their Father. Jesus condemned the Pharisees by saying:

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

Satan lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden and has been lying to men ever since that time. In Revelation, it is said that Satan “deceiveth the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). He is a vicious creature that is ready at every opportunity to destroy God’s children. Satan seeks to devour and destroy everyone. No one who knows the difference between right and wrong has ever been exempt from the temptations of the devil. All who have ever lived on the earth and been accountable for sins have fallen into the snare of the great adversary except for Jesus Christ Himself. Our Father is able and willing to help us in a time of need and despair. James wrote, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam. 1:17). Our Father will not turn his back on us, He is willing and able to deliver all that we need.

BECAUSE OF THE INHERITANCE

Christians are encouraged because of the great inheritance we have. The apostle Peter wrote:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

The inheritance which the Father gives His children is not subject to decay. This world is not permanent because things decay, erode, and fade away. God’s inheritance is eternal and everlasting. Material possessions do not last forever. Man is constantly rebuilding and replacing things that were once new. Paul wrote concerning eternal things and our new bodies in heaven. He said:

For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an 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 (2 Cor. 5:1-2).

Decay or corruption is not in the nature of the eternal state in which God has prepared for His faithful children.

Our inheritance is not subject to spot or blemish. *Defiled* means “without blemish.” As Christians, we are to live in purity and holiness. The inspired Paul wrote:

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

The admonition that Paul gives is for Christians to live a transformed life, keep the body pure and holy before the eyes of God. God’s children will have spotless garments in heaven. “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5). White is a symbol of purity and holiness. All who enter through the gates of heaven will be arrayed in white to signify their purity. Only one cleansing agent can remove the stain of sin from our lives, and that is the blood of Christ.

And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (Rev. 1:5).

One must realize that God will not allow anything unclean and impure through the gates of heaven. Every wicked and evil thing will be kept out of heaven by the authority of God Almighty (Rev. 22:15). Even Satan himself will not be allowed to enter the eternal bliss that God has prepared for His children. God will cast the wicked into the fires of hell to be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 21:8).

The inheritance will not fade away. Flowers bloom into a beautiful array of color and then soon fade away (Jam. 1:10). Things on the earth lose their shine and glory. Silver and brass will tarnish and lose their brightness. Things wear out and get used up, but not the things God has prepared for His children. Peter said, “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:4). The apostle Paul wrote, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). The glory of heaven will never in all of eternity lose its glory and beauty.

BECAUSE OF THE PREPARATION

Christians are encouraged because of the great preparation that God has made for His children. The plan to save man was not an afterthought as some might believe and teach. Those who reject the kingdom being established teach that Jesus could not set up an earthly kingdom; so He set up the church instead. This kind of reasoning does not have Bible proof. They leave us to believe that the church is just a mere afterthought in the mind of God. But the Word of God teaches that the church was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world was laid. Paul wrote:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11).

God predetermined or predestined to save those who are in Christ (Eph. 1:4-5). One must be baptized into Christ before he can become a child of God (Gal. 3:26-27). Our Lord adds those baptized to the one and only church (Acts 2:41, 47). God purposed to save those who are in Christ by His grace and mercy coupled with our obedience.

The beauty and glory of heaven is beyond the comprehension of man's finite mind. The Holy Spirit uses language which gives man a vivid picture of the grand and glorious home that awaits God's children. The city of God is four-square with an array of colors in the wall. The city is describe as being pure gold and shiny like glass. There are twelve gates to the city, and each gate is made of pearl (Rev. 21). Inside the city is the Tree of Life which produces fruit for eternal life all year round. The River of Life flows through the middle, which also is a source of life (Rev. 22). The sun and the moon will never shine in heaven because the glory of God is the light of the city (Rev. 21). Everything is ready for eternity. There is no need for food, water, or light because God has provided everything that His children need. One can easily see that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.

CONCLUSION

Encouraging statements are needful in the life of a Christian to help overcome the discouragements of the world. If Satan has one tool that he uses more often than others, it would be the tool of discouragement. There are many disappointments and problems that each one of us face

every day, yet we can be encouraged by the grand and glorious statements made in reference to our salvation.

God has promised eternal life to the faithful. One must surrender himself to His will to receive the everlasting reward of heaven. The final words that the faithful in Christ will hear is: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat. 25:34). No other words will have a sweeter sound as we stand before the great King to receive our inheritance.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“HE IS NOT HERE: FOR HE IS RISEN” MATTHEW 28:6

Jerry Murrell



Jerry Murrell was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and grew up in Munford, Alabama. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather have all served as elders in the Lord's church. He is married to Sherry (Honeycutt), and they have three children. Jerry earned his B.A. degree in Bible from Faulkner University, an M.A. degree in New Testament from Freed-Hardeman University, and a Master of Divinity degree from David Lipscomb. Jerry is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He is the author of *Women's Role in the church: Paul of Pop Culture*. He currently works with the Needmore Church of Christ in Indian Mound, Tennessee.

INTRODUCTION

If one reads the earliest sermons of gospel preachers, he will see an emphasis on the resurrection of Christ. On the day that the church began, Peter preached a sermon about Christ. If a title were given to this sermon it might have been called “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God” (Acts 2:22). The body of this sermon is recorded by Luke in fifteen verses. Peter uses nine verses (Acts 2:24-32) to argue that “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32).

The first sermon from the apostle Paul, that has been recorded by Luke, is his sermon in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-41). Paul begins by giving an overview of Jewish history until the time of Jesus (Acts 13:17-26). Next, Paul reminds them that the Jewish rulers had been the ones who caused Pilate to put Jesus to death (Acts 13:27-28). Then Paul tells his audience that Jesus was buried (Acts 13:29).¹ Further Paul spends seven verses arguing that Jesus was raised from the dead by God (Acts 13:30-37). Paul closes his sermon in Deuteromeric style with a promise of blessings or cursings (Acts 13:38-41).

They gave this emphasis to the resurrection of Christ because the people being addressed were not believers in Christ. They were willing to hear the Word (Rom. 10:17), but they did not yet believe that Jesus was the son of God (Acts 16:31).

During the 1950s, the Lord's church grew at an amazing rate. The reason is that people were willing to teach the gospel to their neighbors. When they held these discussions, most of the non-Christians being studied with already believed in the existence of God, that the Bible is His word, and that He raised his son Jesus from the dead. This is no longer the case, which means that we must now start to teach people where they are. In the 1950s all we had to do to help people become Christians was to teach them the truth about baptism and denominationalism.² In the 1960s and 1970s, people needed to receive a study with a greater emphasis on repentance³ before they obeyed the gospel.

Today, many people that we will try to help obey the gospel do not even believe that Jesus is the Son of God, which shows us the need for Christian apologetics in today's world. For this reason Peter warned us that we need to "*be* ready always to *give* an answer⁴ to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Apologetics has three great tasks. We must be able to prove the existence of God, the Deity of Christ,⁵ and the inspiration of the Bible. Once this has been accomplished, one is well on the way to establishing the foundation from which a person can be converted to Christ. The strongest evidence for the Deity of Christ is His resurrection from the dead. If God raised Him from the dead, He is who He claimed to be, the "Son of God" (Mat. 16:16-18). It will be the burden of this study to demonstrate the truth of the angel's statement: "He is not here: for He is risen" (Mat. 28:6).

THE DANGER OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The apostle Paul was probably the greatest defender of the resurrection of Jesus in history. He made his longest defense of the resurrection of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15. In this chapter Paul affirms to the Corinthians that if Christ has not been resurrected: (1) We will not be resurrected (1 Cor. 15:13);⁶ (2) Our (the apostles) preaching is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14); (3) Since our preaching is in vain your faith is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14); (4) All the apostles are false witnesses (1 Cor.

15:15); (5) Since your faith is in vain, you are still in your sins (1 Cor. 15:17); (6) We only have hope in this life and are therefore "of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Paul preached an important sermon on Mars Hill in Athens, based on the resurrection of Jesus. Paul begins by arguing for the existence of God based on His creation (Acts 17:22-29). Then Paul begins to conclude his sermon calling on all men to repent (Acts 17:30). The reason that all men should repent is that there is a judgment day coming in which Jesus will act as judge (Acts 17:31a). Paul states that God "hath given assurance" of this to all men by raising Jesus "from the dead" (Acts 17:31b). In his commentary on Acts, F. F. Bruce translates the phrase "hath given assurance" (*pistin parecho*) as "having provided proof" (386). Thus Paul bases repentance (the work of man), the judgment day, and the role of Jesus as judge (the work of Christ) on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

In Romans, Paul argues that the confession that leads to salvation (Rom. 10:10) is based on a belief in one's heart "that God hath raised him from the dead" (Rom. 10:9). This agrees with the way he began the book of Romans when he wrote that the fleshly Jesus (Rom. 1:3) was "declared⁷ to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

These affirmations prove that the truth of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the foundation facts of Christianity. As Rex Turner, Sr., observed:

Everything that is implied in the term Christian, and everything that the experience of being a Christian contemplates, has its foundation in the fact of the miraculous resurrection Christ... If Christ arose from the dead all other miracles will be freely admitted; and all that is claimed for Christ will be granted. His resurrection is the crowning miracle, the very foundation of the Christian faith (211).

Since the resurrection is so important to Christianity, the question must be asked: "Can it be proven that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead?"⁸ It will be the burden of this study to argue that this question can be answered in the affirmative. This will be shown by first noting the evidence that is almost universally granted by those that study this question. Then the evidence for the four facts that are necessary elements of the biblical doctrine of the resurrection of Christ will be discussed. During this discussion alternative interpretations of the facts

will be evaluated. These will serve to make the case for the bodily resurrection of Christ.

UNIVERSALLY RECOGNIZED FACTS

There are at least twelve facts that are universally recognized by almost all who have studied the evidence concerning the resurrection of Christ.⁹ The following list of facts is taken from a debate between Gary Habermas and the famed atheist Antony Flew. Flew did not deny that any of these well-known facts were true. Habermas said:

(1) Jesus died due to the rigors of crucifixion¹⁰ and (2) was buried.¹¹

(3) Jesus' death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope

(4) Although not as frequently recognized, many scholars hold that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was discovered to be empty just a few days later.

Critical scholars even agree that (5) at this time the disciples had real experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus. Because of these experiences, (6) the disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of his death and Resurrection, even being willing to die for this belief. (7) This message was central in the early church preaching and (8) was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem where Jesus had died shortly before.

As a result of this message, (9) the church was born and grew, (10) with Sunday as the primary day of worship. (11) James the brother of Jesus and a skeptic, was converted to the faith when he also believed he saw the resurrection of Jesus. (12) A few years later Paul the persecutor of Christians was also converted by an experience that he, similarly, believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus (19-20).

THE FOUR ESSENTIAL FACTS

Four facts are essential to the demonstration of the truth of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. When these four facts are taken together, they constitute an airtight case for the resurrection of Jesus. The facts are that: (1) Jesus died, (2) Jesus was buried, (3) The tomb of Jesus was later found empty, (4) Jesus appeared to witnesses.

Jesus Died

It is this author's position that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, Word of God. However, for the sake of argument, at this point all that needs to be granted, for the case that will be developed for the resurrection of Jesus, is the general historical reliability of the Bible.¹² If one reads the Bible, from a purely historical perspective, one will be convinced that Jesus died.

The biblical accounts allow for no other conclusion to be reached. One Thursday night, Jesus was arrested and His disciples forsook Him (Mat. 26:47-56). He was then kept up all night while being illegally tried by the Jews (John 18:12-23; Mat. 26:57-68). During this trial He was beaten and spat upon (Mat. 26:67). Friday morning He was taken to be tried by Pilate (John 18:28-38), who sent Him to be tried by Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12). Herod mocked Him and sent Him back to Pilate (Luke 6:11). He was again tried by Pilate (Mat. 27:15-30). Pilate had Him scourged (John 19:10), had a crown of thorns slapped on His head (John 19:2), and allowed the Roman soldiers to hit Him with their fists. Finally Pilate reluctantly sentenced Jesus to be crucified (John 19:6-15).

Jesus was forced to carry His own cross (John 19:17). Apparently, after Jesus collapsed, they compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross (Mark 15:21). When they came to Golgotha, they laid Jesus on a cross and they drove spikes through His wrists and feet (Mark 15:25).¹³ Death by crucifixion was particularly horrifying. Three medical doctors have written an article together which states that Jesus probably died of hypovolemic shock, exhaustion asphyxia, and heart failure (Edwards, Gabel, Hosmer, 255:1455-1463).¹⁴

In the past, not all who studied this question admitted that Jesus really died on the cross. Skeptics who argued that He was not even crucified were met with secular historians who affirm the essential elements of the biblical record. For example the Jewish historian, Josephus, records concerning Jesus that "Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross" (18:3.64).¹⁵ Also, the first century Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote that "Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius" (Geisler, 323).

Others, who did not believe that Jesus died on the cross, held to what is called the swoon theory. Simply put, this theory is that Jesus only appeared to die on the cross. He actually passed out and was buried by people who mistakenly thought He was dead. Then, three days later, He revived and forced His way out of the tomb and past the guards. This theory seems to trace its way back to the deist H. E. G. Paulus in his work *Das Leben Jesu* (1828).¹⁶ In this work, he attempted to explain away all the miracles of Jesus by use of natural causes. This explanation is so ridiculous as to be impossible.

First, it fails to take into account the physical injuries that Jesus sustained, as outlined above. The doctors cited above conclude that “interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appears to be at odds with modern medical knowledge” (Edwards, 1463). Second, it fails to account for Christ’s statement that He had committed His spirit to God (Luke 23:46) and John’s affirmation that He “gave up the ghost” (John 19:30).

Third, it fails to explain how the Roman soldiers, so familiar with death, could mistakenly pronounce Him dead, while recognizing that the two criminals crucified with Him were alive (John 19:32-33). One of these soldiers apparently pierced His heart and lungs with a spear (John 19:34). Pilate double checked with the soldier in charge who also pronounced Jesus dead (Mark 15:44-45). This theory is also inadequate because as Craig explained, “a half-dead Jesus desperately in need of medical attention would not have elicited in the disciples worship of him as the exalted Risen Lord and Conqueror of Death” (*Contemporary*, 11). No wonder Rex Turner said, “The testimony of those soldiers would stand in court, and the testimony of a carping infidel who lived two thousand years later would be laughed out of court” (213).

Fourth, it fails to explain how Jesus survived and escaped His burial in a tomb. They would have tightly wrapped Him in about 100 pounds of cloth and spices (Mat. 27:60; John 19:39-40). If He were not yet dead, the combination of a lack of food and water and medical attention would have killed Him. Then, after unwrapping Himself, He could not possibly have rolled the giant stone out of the way and gotten by the guards.

There is no other alternative that fits the evidence available. Jesus Christ died of crucifixion under the command of Pilate. The first essential element of proof of the resurrection of Jesus has been proven.

The Burial of Jesus

The importance of the burial of Jesus has been overlooked by many. But this was not so in the first century. As Paul listed the three facts that he delivered to the Corinthians, “first of all” he included the fact that “he was buried” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). The importance of the burial of Christ continues “until this day.” Craig has observed, “Put simply, if the burial account is reliable, then we can conclude that the tomb of Jesus must have been known to the Jews and to Jesus’ disciples”—and if this is true “the tomb must have been found empty” (*Knowing*, 39).

The earliest written testimony on behalf of the historicity of Christ's burial is from Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. The most widely held date for 1 Corinthians is A.D. 57 (Guthrie, 458). Since Paul is reminding the Corinthians that this was the primary message he *delivered* to them, this means that Paul had told them of Christ's burial when he first visited Corinth. The account of this visit is found in Acts 18. This visit to Corinth probably happened about A.D. 51.¹⁷

However, this material used in the sermon that Paul originally preached at Corinth probably comes from an even earlier time. The Romans crucified Jesus in A.D. 30. About A.D. 33 Paul left Judaism to become a Christian. Paul goes on to say that three years after his conversion (A.D. 36), he went to Jerusalem and visited with Peter and James (Gal. 1:18-19). Both Peter and James would have had first-hand knowledge of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. When Paul lists the witnesses that saw Jesus after His resurrection, he first lists Peter and James (1 Cor. 15:5-8) (Craig, *Knowing*, 41) It seems that the events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus must have been a topic of conversation between these men.

This date indicates that the burial of Jesus is not a legend that arose much later. Mark probably gives the earliest detailed account of the burial of Jesus. Mark tells us that Joseph of Arimathaea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus (Mark 15:43). This is recorded in all four gospel accounts. Pilate gave him the body of Jesus (Mark 15:43). So Joseph "bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre" (Mark 15:46). Mark writes that two women, who were well known to the early church, witnessed the burial (Mark 15:47).

The evidence indicates that, after the crucifixion, Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea. Wilbur Smith has said, "We know more about the burial of the Lord Jesus than we know of the burial of any single character in all of ancient history" (370). Even the skeptical theologian, Rudolf Bultmann, said of the burial account, "This is an historical account which creates no impression of being a legend" (26).

However, not everyone accepts the fact that Jesus was buried. No doubt seeing the implications of the burial of Christ, one of the leading lights of the *Jesus Seminar*, John Dominic Crossan, denies that Jesus

was buried. He believes that Jesus' corpse was thrown into the criminals' graveyard and eaten by wild dogs (*The Historical*, 392-93). He does not believe that any of the followers of Christ could have gotten His body for burial because

it would have been impossible, without influence or bribery, to obtain a crucified corpse. And it might also be very dangerous to request it, lest even familial association with a condemned criminal be judged as part of the problem and handled accordingly (*Jesus*, 153).

This is an interesting argument, which states that the only person who could have possibly been responsible for the burial of Jesus would have to have been (1) influential and/or rich and (2) in a position to be free from "guilt by association" with Jesus.

This brings us to Joseph of Arimathaea. Joseph was a man who would want to bury the body of Jesus. John tells us that he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews (John 19:38; cf., Mat. 27:57); he therefore could have bribed Pilate.¹⁸ Luke tells us that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:50-51). This would suggest that he would have had influence with Pilate, who seemed to be trying to please the Jews in this whole account. His presence on the Sanhedrin, which condemned Christ and sent Him to Pilate, would distance Joseph from charges of being associated with Jesus. Furthermore, the normal problems with being associated with a condemned criminal would not be as acute in this case as it normally was. Pilate obviously did not see Jesus as a revolutionary who wanted to be an earthy king, as the Jews charged, since Pilate wanted to release Jesus (John 19:12).

Someone might assert that all four gospel writers made up Joseph of Arimathaea out of thin air. One argument that has been advanced against the truth of this account is that Acts 13:29 says that it was not His followers but the Jews that buried Jesus. However, Raymond Brown is quick to reply that, since the Joseph story makes it clear that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, there is no tension between the two accounts (114). Craig says that even the most skeptical scholars¹⁹ admit that

Joseph was probably the genuine, historical individual who buried Jesus, since it is unlikely that early Christian believers would invent an individual, give him a name and nearby town of origin, and place this fictional character on the historical council of the Sanhedrin, whose members were well known (*Knowing*, 46-47).

The Empty Tomb

Now that it has been established that Jesus died and was buried, the next step in our apologetic for the resurrection is to prove that the tomb was found empty. The importance of the empty tomb to the case for the resurrection of Jesus cannot be overestimated. If the story of the burial of Jesus is reliable, then the Jews and also the followers of Jesus, knew where the tomb was located. According to Craig, this means that the tomb must have been found empty. First, the apostles would never have believed in the resurrection if the tomb still contained a corpse. Second, no one would have believed their preaching that Jesus was risen if His body were still in the grave. Third, the opponents of Christianity would have exposed the fraud by pointing to the grave or by "perhaps even exhuming the body and parading it through the streets of Jerusalem" (*Knowing*, 64).

The early teaching, found in the writings of Paul, is again important. He told the Corinthians that he "delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ...was buried, and that he rose again the third day" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This statement implies that Paul is claiming that the tomb of Christ was found empty.²⁰ To the early Christians and Jews, resurrection and an empty tomb were inseparable. Since Paul was in Jerusalem six years after the resurrection of Jesus (cf., Gal. 1:18-19), the tomb must have been empty then. Also, since Paul saw Peter and James on that trip (Gal. 1:18-19), the tomb must have been empty from the beginning, or belief in the resurrection of Jesus on the third day would never have been possible (Craig, *Knowing*, 67-68).

Another evidence that the tomb was empty was that the first witnesses to the empty tomb were women (Mark 16:1-8). Women could not serve as witnesses in Jewish society. If the gospel writers had made up the story of the empty tomb, they certainly would have had males as the first witnesses to the empty tomb. This story has an extra air of credibility to it because Mary Magdalene did not expect to find an empty tomb (John 20:1-2). They certainly would not have made women the heroes while the disciples hid (Craig, *Knowing*, 76). This makes the story of the empty tomb very credible.

No one disputes that the disciples began to declare that Jesus had been raised from the dead less than two months after He was crucified (Acts 2). The Christian message would have never gotten off the

ground if the body of Christ was still in the tomb. Even if the burial story were false, the Jews could have produced the body of Jesus from the criminals' graveyard and stopped the church dead in its tracks. The fact that the message of the resurrection of Christ began to flourish in the city where Jesus was crucified and buried indicates that the resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact.

The Jewish cover story shows that the tomb was found empty. Matthew tells us how the Jews tried to answer the testimony of the empty tomb. If the tomb was not empty, the Jews would have simply produced the body of Christ. Instead, Matthew says that the Jewish leaders bribed the soldiers (Mat. 28:13) and told them to say, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept" (Mat. 28:13). They took the money and the story was commonly told among the Jews until the time Matthew wrote (Mat. 28:15). This early Jewish propaganda presupposes an empty tomb.

There are some alternative ways that some try to explain the empty tomb other than that Jesus was raised from the dead. Of course, if the fourth pillar of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus stands, Jesus' appearances to witnesses, then these explanations all are hopeless.

One alternative theory is that the tomb was not really empty, but the women went to the wrong tomb. This is usually accompanied with the explanation that the women tried to find the right tomb, but the darkness (John 20:1) prevented their doing so. Nevertheless, after Mary Magdalene found Peter and John and brought them back to the tomb, surely the sun was up (John 20:2-6). In fact, there was enough light that they could see the grave clothes folded inside the cave-like tomb (John 20:6-7). If they went to the wrong tomb, why did the Jewish leaders not produce the body at least by Pentecost? Surely, atheists must have a better explanation than this one.

Another alternative theory is that Joseph of Arimathaea took the body. Geisler points out that the problem with this theory boils down to "'Why?' 'When?' and 'Where?'" (645). There was no reason for him to take the body.

Joseph had no opportunity to take the body. As a Jew, he would not have broken the Sabbath (Luke 23:50-56). He could not have gone at night without his torch being seen. He could not have rolled the stone away by himself (Mark 16:3-4). If he involved others, the story would have gotten out. The tomb was too well-guarded for him to remove the

body (Mat. 27:62-66). On the day after the Sabbath the women were there by dawn (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

If Joseph did take the body, where did he hide it? Surely, he would have been found out by the Jewish authorities if he did take the body. Joseph did not have the motive, means, or opportunity to take the body of Christ.

Another alternative theory is that the authorities²¹ stole the body of Christ. This also fails to meet the light of examination. If they stole the body, they were creating an empty tomb that led to the very belief that they were trying to avoid, that Jesus had risen from the dead on the third day (Mat. 27:63-64). If they stole the body, why did they accuse the disciples of stealing the body (Mat. 28:13). They could simply have produced the body of Christ and ended Christianity at any time. "They continually *resisted* the apostles' teaching but never attempted to refute it" (Geisler, 644).

The worst alternative theory to explain the empty tomb was also the original theory, that the disciples stole the body while the guards slept (Mat. 28:13). First, this does not fit anything that we know about the disciples. At the time of the crucifixion, they had all fled. Surely, they would not have more courage after Christ's death than they had before He died. They would not have tried to sneak around the guards (Mat. 27:65-66) to take the body.

They also did not have the kind of moral character to steal his body and then lie about it (1 Cor. 15:15). If they did lie, why did they place the resurrection at the center of their faith (1 Cor. 15:1-5) and then all but John died for that lie? Peter specifically denied that they had followed "cunningly devised fables" (2 Pet. 1:16). If they did steal the body, how did the soldiers know who did it while they slept (Mat. 28:13)? With the soldiers to serve as witnesses, why were they not arrested as grave robbers?

The tomb was empty. Since the tomb was empty and we have noticed that there is no naturalistic theory that can explain away the empty tomb, the empty tomb becomes strong evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. The reason the tomb was empty was explained by the angel: "He is risen, as he said" (Mat. 28:6).

Christ Appeared to Witnesses

Having established the first three pillars of the resurrection, only the fourth remains and then it will have been proven that God raised Jesus

from the dead. This pillar, like the others, is essential to the case being made in this study. If Christ did not appear to witnesses, it could never be established that someone did not steal His body.

Christ appeared to witnesses on at least twelve separate occasions. Paul lists 513 men, most of whom were alive, who could serve as witnesses of Christ's resurrection to the Corinthian church, who to some extent were either actually, or by implication, doubting the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

First, Paul recounts that Christ appeared to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5). This appearance is not detailed in any of the gospel accounts though Luke alludes to it (Luke 24:33-34). No doubt Paul received an account of this appearance just six years after it happened (Gal. 1:18).

Second, Paul says that Jesus appeared to the twelve (1 Cor. 15:5). This probably refers to the time that Jesus appeared in the room with them and ate fish (Luke 24:36-43; cf., John 20:19-20). Its truth is verified in the Synoptics, John, and 1 Corinthians 15, which lends weight to its credibility. All the living apostles at that time saw Him at once.

Then Paul says that Jesus was seen of five hundred brethren at once, most of whom were still alive in A.D. 55 (1 Cor. 15:6). This comment shows that Paul had personal knowledge of what these people saw. Since Jesus once fed five thousand men (John 6:1-15), it is not hard to believe that five hundred could be brought together at once to see Him. As C. H. Dodd said, "There can hardly be any purpose in mentioning the fact that most of the 500 are still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, 'the witnesses are there to be questioned'" (128).

Then Paul lists Christ's appearance to James (1 Cor. 15:7). Again, the gospel accounts do not contain this appearance. During Christ's lifetime, James did not believe in Him (Mark 3:21, 31-35; John 7:1-10). But by the time of the book of Acts, James is a believer, (Acts 1:14) and later a prominent member of the church (Acts 15:13ff). The only explanation for this change is the resurrection appearance of 1 Corinthians 15:7. The information concerning this appearance probably came to Paul from James six years after the resurrection (Gal. 1:18-19). Except for Paul, Frank Morison considers the conversion of James to be the strongest evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead (125).²² Even Hans Grass says this appearance provides one of the surest proofs of Christ's resurrection (Craig, *Knowing*, 92).

Then Paul lists the appearance to the apostles (1 Cor. 15:7). This is most likely at the giving of the Great Commission (Mat. 28:16-20). Again, all the apostles who were living at that time saw Him at once.

Finally, Paul lists the appearance of Christ to himself (1 Cor. 15:8). The account of this event appears three times in the book of Acts (Acts 9:1-7; 22:6-11; 26:13-19). Before this appearance of Christ, Paul was persecuting the church (Acts 26:11-12). He was a more zealous Pharisee than his own peers (Phi. 3:5; Gal. 1:14). Paul gave up the life of a respected Rabbi for the life of a persecuted preacher (2 Cor. 11:24-33). The only way to explain this change is if Paul actually saw the resurrected Christ.

The gospel accounts provide additional evidence of appearances of Jesus.²³ Some have criticized these appearances and called them hopelessly contradictory. The fact that they do not fit together with simply a surface look at the text suggests that they are credible. One can see at least one method of working these problems out in J. W. McGarvey's *Fourfold Gospel*.

Simon Greenleaf, the Harvard lawyer, was not a believer until he had examined the evidence found in the gospel accounts. After his study, he wrote an excellent book defending the gospel accounts by applying the legal rules of evidence to them. He concluded that copies of the gospel accounts "would have been received in evidence in any court of justice without the slightest hesitation" (9-10).

There are only four possible explanations for the appearances of Christ: (1) Those that claimed to see Him were all liars; (2) Those that claimed to see Him were all suffering from hallucinations;²⁴ (3) The alleged appearances of Christ were based on mistaken identity; (4) Those that claim to have seen Christ really saw Him because He was resurrected. If the first three theories can be falsified, the fourth theory will stand as the only possible explanation for these appearances.

Those that claimed to have seen Christ were not liars. Flew believes that the apostles were liars, but he does not want to call them liars. In his debate with Habermas he said he hoped to avoid "this sort of eighteenth century discussion, trial of witnesses, you've either got to say that these people who died for their convictions were deliberate, conscious liars" (36), but that is what he argued concerning the apostles, except Paul.

The biggest problem with this theory is, as has been explained above, the tomb was found empty, which would not be the case if the apostles were lying about the appearances of Christ. This theory would also imply that the apostles were of low moral character. This assumption is not borne out by the record that we have of the apostles and would also mean that all of these “lying apostles,” and many others, underwent persecution and often death for a lie. This is contrary to common sense.²⁵

The change that was seen in both Paul and James also shows that this theory is false. They did not go from being skeptics to converts based on lies. The witnesses were not liars.

Those that saw the resurrected Jesus were not all suffering from hallucinations. Even Flew says of the hallucination theory, “I was only offering this suggestion in the case of Paul, which is the appearance story for which we have the best evidence” (51).

The reason that Flew did not offer the hallucination theory for the other appearances of Jesus is simple. Even Flew had to admit that hallucinations are not shared experiences. Only one person can have a hallucination. So hallucinations do not explain any of the appearances of the risen Jesus to groups of people (40-51). Besides, hallucinations are usually associated with mental illness or drugs (Craig, *Contemporary*, 11), neither of which were problems for Paul. As an enemy of Christ, he was “not in the proper frame of mind for hallucinations, nor would he be convinced by lies” (Habermas, 39).

Some account for Paul’s *hallucination* by citing the guilt struggle he was having under the law of Moses,²⁶ but Paul denied this struggle by saying that under the law he was “blameless” (Phi. 3:6) and with a “good conscience” (Acts 23:1). Even if he were having this struggle, this still would not explain why he would have a hallucination concerning a man that he considered a friend of publicans and sinners and a blasphemer: Jesus. This theory also has no explanation for the empty tomb that formerly contained the body of Jesus. The hallucination theory offers no hope for the atheist; it is a mere mirage.

Those that claimed to see Jesus were not mistakenly identifying someone else as Jesus. This is based on the fact that in some of the appearances of Christ they did not recognize Him at first.²⁷

Actually, each of those instances lends credibility to the accounts. Obviously these people did not expect to see the risen Jesus; so it is not

likely that they made up these appearances to fit a preconceived theory that He must be risen. The mistaken identity theory does not explain who the obviously crucified man was that convinced a skeptical Thomas that He was Jesus (John 20:24-29). It also does not explain how the skeptical James could misidentify someone as his own half-brother (1 Cor. 15:7). The death knell to this and all other naturalistic explanations of the appearances of Jesus is that none of them explain the empty tomb.

Since none of these first three theories are true, the fourth theory is the only explanation left. Those that claimed to see Jesus really saw Him because God raised Jesus from the dead, on the third day, just as He predicted (Mat. 16:21).

CONCLUSION

The evidence that God raised Jesus from the dead is overwhelming. Even the critics of the resurrection have been forced to admit the evidence used to make the case of the bodily resurrection of Christ is true. In logical form, the case made in this paper is as follows:

1. If it is the case that Jesus died on the cross, was buried in Joseph's tomb, Joseph's tomb was subsequently found empty, and Jesus then appeared to credible witnesses, then God raised Jesus from the dead.
2. It is the case that Jesus died on the cross, was buried in Joseph's tomb, Joseph's tomb was subsequently found empty, and Jesus then appeared to credible witnesses.
3. Therefore, God raised Jesus from the dead.

The form of the above argument is valid and the premises have been demonstrated to be true in the above study. Given all the evidence that God has provided for us, we can believe in our hearts "that God hath raised him from the dead" so we can be saved (Rom. 10:9). Let us take the message to the world that we serve a risen Savior who died for all mankind.

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ENDNOTES

¹The importance of the burial of Jesus will become apparent in the body of this study.

²The Jule Miller filmstrips that were so effective did just this. The filmstrips gave an overview of the Bible with an emphasis on these ideas and the difference in the old and the new covenants that was generally not recognized by the denominational world.

³It is this author's opinion that many of the elders in liberal churches were taught the gospel without this emphasis, and we are now reaping the consequences of this sowing.

⁴The original uses the word *apologia*, which means to make a defense.

⁵This is contrary to the view of John Dominic Crossan of the *Jesus Seminar* who argues that "The example of Thomas is a clear statement that it is not blessed to seek signs or proofs of literal resurrection. In fact, it's cursed." William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?: A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Paul Copan (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), p. 59. Crossan spends great energy examining (and in my view mishandling) the evidence concerning Jesus' life for someone with this view, unless he knows before he begins that he does not intend to reach a conclusion that would have the evidence serve as a basis of faith for him.

⁶This is by implication since in this verse Paul links the resurrection of Jesus and the general resurrection of mankind together.

⁷Macknight says that *declared* signified "to fix the boundaries of a thing, consequently to make it appear what it is." James Macknight, *Macknight on the Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, Reprinted 1984), p. 56.

⁸This is against the view of John Spong who said that if the tomb, which he doubts even existed, "had been found empty, it would have meant only one more insult had been delivered to the leader of the tiny Jesus movement." John Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1995), p. 228. If one would like to see what Paul meant when he said that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19), then I recommend that you read the last chapter of Spong's book.

⁹After reading these *admissions*, one might ask why it is that all learned men do not accept the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. This writer believes that the root problems are caused by the agnosticism of Immanuel Kant, the a priori denial of miracles based on the works of David Hume, and the attacks on the New Testament by Rudolf Bultmann that grew out of the work of these two men.

¹⁰This and other points that were disputed in the past are now almost universally admitted. These points will be discussed more fully in later sections.

¹¹This is denied by some of the *Jesus Seminar* people.

¹²For a brief summary of the case for this premise see Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), pp. 305-327.

¹³For a discussion of the Roman method of crucifixion see Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 945-952.

¹⁴Their conclusion is that Jesus was dead before the spear was thrust into Him which pierced His right lung, and the pericardium and heart. This would serve to certainly establish that Jesus was dead.

¹⁵Not all accept this passage as being authentic.

¹⁶This is also the theory of the father of modern liberalism, Schleiermacher.

¹⁷This is based on Gallio's Proconsulship and is one of the most sure dates in New Testament studies. See F. F. Bruce, *Paul the Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 253-255.

¹⁸Though this scribe does not believe that he did, this possibility would be enough to take the force away from Crossan's argument.

¹⁹Except Crossan whose case has been demolished.

²⁰Craig said that even today, if someone told us that a man had died, was buried, rose from the dead, and was seen of witnesses, only a theologian would think to ask whether or not his body was still in the grave. William Lane Craig, "The Historicity of

the Empty Tomb of Jesus,” *William Lane Craig Articles*, [On-line], URL <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/tomb2.html>> (Feb 9, 2001), p. 3.

²¹Most that hold this view would charge the Jews, but a few would accuse the Romans.

²²Morison began as person who had taken the higher critical view of the Bible until he studied the evidence for the last week in the life of Christ as he was writing his book. This study caused him to be convinced that God raised Jesus from the dead.

²³Because of space limitations we will not take the time to study these appearances as closely as the ones recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

²⁴Since Flew lumps together the vision and the hallucination theories, for brevity’s sake we will also do so here. He also offers a combination of the first and second theory to explain the appearances to the other witnesses.

²⁵As seen from the above quotation, even Flew is not comfortable with this implication of this theory.

²⁶This is based on a misunderstanding of Romans 7:8ff.

²⁷For example Mary thought He was the gardener (John 20:15), and the two men on the road to Damascus did not recognize Him (Luke 24:13ff).

JESUS' REASSURING MESSAGE TO PETER MARK 16:7

Billy Bland



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INTRODUCTION

What does a Christian do once he has sinned? Does his failure indicate that Christ no longer has any use for him? Should he adopt the attitude that he has tried, but he simply cannot live the Christian life? When one is genuinely attempting to live the life Christ has set before him, then realizes he has come short of that life, it can be a very frustrating experience. Jesus, Himself, never sinned: “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22). While it is true that Jesus never sinned, such cannot be stated relative to any of His disciples. Jesus showed us the Father (John 14:9), but the disciples show us—us! Probably none of the disciples does this any more than does Peter. All of us can empathize with him because we can see so much of us in him! Peter was a man that wanted to serve his Master successfully, yet he often fell short of his goal. How many times have we, in attempting to serve our Savior, been overtaken in a fault, or found that we have disappointed God as well as ourselves by allowing

sin into our lives? One of the encouraging factors of the Bible is that it shows us the shortcomings and sins of great men of God. Even David, a man after God's own heart, sinned, but upon his repentance came back to serve God successfully. Such also could be said of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and many others. With these thoughts in mind, let us look at a few things regarding Peter and how Jesus encouraged him, even though he often fell short.

THE SELECTION OF PETER

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone (John 1:35-42).

Peter had been a disciple of John the Baptist and was introduced by Andrew, his brother, to the Christ. Jesus could see something promising in Peter, that perhaps Peter did not fully appreciate at that time. Jesus stated to Peter: "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42). *Cephas* is Aramaic whereas the word *stone* is Greek. Jesus could see that Peter would become a *rock* for Him. There will be many times in Peter's life, however, that he might doubt that he was worthy of that appellation. It is most encouraging to know what Jesus can make of us, if we will continue with Him.

Peter would have the distinct privilege of traveling along side of Jesus as one of His apostles, beholding His miracles and hearing His wonderful words of life. He would become exceedingly close to the Son of God. Imagine spending some three years along side the Messiah, watching His moves and hearing His powerful message. Think also of the honor of being commissioned by Jesus to carry God's Gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Peter (along with the others), would preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He (and

they), would heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons (Mat. 10:6-8). It was to Peter that Jesus said:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Mat. 16:18-19).

Peter had just confessed that Jesus is the Son of God. Upon the solid foundation that Jesus is the Son of God, Christ would build His church. It should be noted that Christ did not promise to build His church upon Peter (*Petros*), but upon the rock (*Petra*), that Christ is the Son of God. Peter also would have the privilege of having the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He would use these keys on Pentecost to open the door to the church (Acts 2:37-47). The statement: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," was stated to all the apostles as recorded in Mat. 18:18.

All of this shows the great privilege that Peter possessed in traveling with the Christ. However, this did not make Peter a perfect or sinless individual. He, like us, would have his shortcomings (sins).

PETER'S SHORTCOMINGS **"O Thou of Little Faith"**

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God (Mat. 14:22-33).

After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus sends His disciples unto the other side of the sea. They are in a ship in the fourth watch of the night and the wind is *boisterous*. In the midst of this, the disciples see Jesus walking on the sea. They think that he is a spirit and cried out for fear. Jesus calms them and says that it is He. Peter, being impetuous, answers, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Jesus invites Peter to come. Peter came down out of the ship and walked on the water. However, when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he became afraid and began to sink. He cried out to the Lord to save him. A. T. Robertson quotes Bruce as commenting, "It is one thing to see a storm from the deck of a stout ship, another to see it in the midst of the waves" (1:119). Regardless of this, Jesus says to Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

How would many in the church today respond, if Jesus said to them "O thou of little faith?" They might *reason* that at least they tried! "No one else said they would walk on the water. I am not going to follow this Jesus, if He is going to insult my faith." Peter, however, did not respond with such. When they got into the ship, the winds ceased and the ones in the ship worshiped "saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God."

"Get Thee Behind Me Satan"

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Mat. 16:21-23).

Jesus had just asked Peter whom did he think that the Christ is. Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mat. 16:16). Jesus now sets forth in plain language that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, then be killed and raised again the third day. Peter did not want this to happen to Jesus. Perhaps also Peter still misunderstood the nature of Christ's kingdom. Peter loved Jesus and did not want Him to suffer such a fate. Jesus, being true to His mission, said unto Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Peter was acting as an adversary (Satan), to the mission of Christ. The total dedication of Christ is truly amazing. Jesus was intent on doing the Father's will, even though it meant Him suffering and ultimately dying on the cross. Peter, unwittingly, was attempting to persuade Christ not to do what God wanted Him to accomplish. Jesus followed up this statement by informing Peter that all must be willing to bear their cross.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mat. 16:24-26).

There is a rebuke from Jesus unto Peter. Peter, again, had failed. Jesus earlier had told Him that he (Peter) did not have a faith that was strong enough to keep him walking on water. Now he is rebuked because he stands as Satan (an adversary), to the mission of Christ. Peter's interest (or thinking), as indicated in his statement, was not with the things of God, but with men.

To Peter's good credit, he evidently learns from the Savior's rebuke and continues to follow Jesus. Many members of the church quit serving the Lord because of lesser things. Peter however was a *rock* in the making. Let us remember that as many as the Lord loves, He rebukes and chastens (Rev. 3:19).

“And The Lord Turned, And Looked Upon Peter”

Jesus, being the Son of God, knew the frailties of His disciples. He foreknew that His disciples would be offended at Him. Peter, being over-confident, stated that he would never be offended at Jesus.

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

It should be noted that all the disciples stated that they would never be offended at Christ; however, Peter seems to be the lead spokesman in the matter. Did Peter mean what he said? Indeed, he did! When they

came to arrest Jesus, Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword: “Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus” (John 18:10). Jesus informs Peter to put away his sword: “Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

Jesus had told Peter that before the cock crew, Peter would deny Him thrice. The Bible reveals Peter’s denial.

Then took they him, and led *him*, and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this *fellow* also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice (Luke 22:54-61).

Peter, again, has failed. He is very disappointed in himself at this point. He had confidently affirmed that he would never be offended at Jesus, but now he has denied Him three times! The text says that when Peter denied Jesus the third time, immediately, the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. The Lord, this time, did not say a word, he simply looks at Peter. The word translated “looked” is from the Greek word *emblepo*, and means “to look on, i.e. (relatively) to observe fixedly, or (absolutely) to discern clearly” (Strong). Vine comments, “This verb implies a close, penetrating ‘look’” (337). What a look from the Lord this must have been to Peter!

PETER’S REPENTANCE

Peter, at this point, must have felt great remorse. He had let the Lord down again! Think of the guilt that Peter must have felt. The text states, “And Peter went out, and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62). Although Peter was a man that was many times impulsive and would fall short of what he should do, he was also a man who would genuinely repent.

Jesus explains what is involved in repentance by a story of a man with two sons.

But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him (Mat. 21:28-32).

From the above passage, one learns that repentance is a change of mind, which results in reformation of life. The first son said he would not go work in his father's vineyard, but afterward "**he repented, and went.**" His change of mind resulted in the reformation of his life.

JESUS' REASSURING MESSAGE TO PETER

There is a very interesting phrase found in the angel's message to the women who came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus.

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first *day* of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you (Mark 16:1-7).

One should notice that in verse 7, the young man (angel), informs the women to tell His disciples **and Peter** that He was going before them into Galilee. Think how reassuring this would have been to Peter. The women, while informing the disciples of the happenings of that morning, could have said something like this: "A young man in a long white garment appeared to us in the tomb and informed us that Jesus was risen from the dead. He told us to tell you, and **Peter he mentioned you by name**, that He was going before you into Galilee, just as He had said!" This would be a way of reassuring Peter that the Lord still loved him and could use him in His service! Are we not privileged

beyond measure to have a God who loves us, even when we have failed Him!

Regarding this verse, Matthew Henry comments:

[1.] It will be good news to him, more welcome to him than to any of them; for he is in sorrow for sin, and no tidings can be more welcome to true penitents than to hear of the resurrection of Christ, because he rose again *for their justification*. [2.] He will be afraid, lest the joy of this good news do not belong to him. Had the angel said only, *Go, tell his disciples*, poor Peter would have been ready to sigh, and say, “But I doubt I cannot look upon myself as one of them, for I disowned him, and deserve to be disowned by him;” to obviate that, “Go to Peter by name, and tell him, he shall be as welcome as any of the rest to see him in Galilee.” Note, A sight of Christ will be very welcome to a true penitent, and a true penitent shall be very welcome to a sight of Christ, for there is joy in heaven concerning him.

It is also noteworthy to read what Mr. Barnes commented relative to this matter:

It is remarkable that Peter is singled out for special notice. It was proof of the kindness and mercy of the Lord Jesus. Peter, just before the death of Jesus, had denied him. He had brought dishonor on his profession of attachment to him. It would have been right if the Lord Jesus had from that moment cast him off and noticed him no more. But he loved him still. Having loved him once, he loved unto the end, John 13:1. As a proof that he forgave him and still loved him, he sent him this “special” message—the assurance that though he had denied him, and had done much to aggravate his sufferings, yet he had risen, and was still his Lord and Redeemer. We are not to infer, because the angel said, “Tell his disciples and Peter,” that Peter was not still a disciple. The meaning is, “Tell his disciples, and especially Peter,” sending to him a particular message.

What do we Christians do when we sin? Is there any hope for us? Can the Lord use us, even though we have sinned on several occasions? What if after we have sinned, then repented, find that we sin again? Is there a limit to how many times the Lord will forgive us? Regarding repentance and forgiveness, Jesus said:

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him (Luke 17:3-4).

Surely, our Lord would do no less.

When the prodigal son came home, while he was a great way off, his father saw him, had compassion, ran, fell on his neck, and kissed

him (Luke 15:20). Why would his father do this? Because he loves his son! Why does God, the Father, forgive us, when we repent? Because He loves us! We are forgiven, not because we deserve forgiveness, but because of the great love of God and the sacrifice provided because of His love (John 3:16).

Once one has become a child of God by hearing the Gospel (Rom. 10:17), believing in Christ (John 8:24), repenting of his sins (Luke 13:3), confessing the Christ (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10), and is baptized for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38), he can rejoice that all his past sins have been removed by the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). This, however, does not mean that he will be sinless. The apostle John makes it abundantly clear that, even as a child of God, we do, at times, sin.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:7-10).

A child of God, upon realizing that he has sinned, is to confess his sins to God, who is willing to forgive them. This is not an inducement to commit sin, in fact it is the very opposite. John wrote to get people out of the sinning business, yet at the same time he is realistic:

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins* of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

It is encouraging to know that we have Christ who is the *propitiation* (appeasement), for our sins.

PETER'S RESTORATION AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Although Peter had sinned, he was restored to His Savior, and his sins would never be remembered against him again. Jesus had foretold of Peter's sin and restoration:

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren (Luke 22:31-32).

Peter's failures did not mean his ultimate downfall. Jesus said, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Jesus knows that all of us fail Him from time to time. However, our failure does not have to be our spiritual ruin. We like Peter, can come back to Christ in a penitent, obedient faith.

The Lord would accomplish many great works through Peter. After Peter's conversion, he was instrumental in selecting an apostle that would replace Judas (Acts 1:15ff). On the day of Pentecost, he boldly preached the resurrected Christ and about three thousand souls were saved (Acts 2:1-47). He heals a lame man at the temple gate called "Beautiful" (Acts 3:1-9). After healing the lame man, he admonishes the Jews to "repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19). When the Jewish rulers told Peter and John not to preach Christ anymore in Jerusalem, the Bible states:

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

Remember, this is the same Peter that earlier denied the Lord, who now stands like a "rock." Peter is instrumental in dealing with the first recorded sin **in the church** (Acts 5). Peter continues to stand against the Jewish rulers who further threatened him and the others for preaching Christ: "Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Peter, along with John will travel to Samaria and lay their hands on the new converts to convey the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit upon them (Acts 18:8). While there he will confront Simon the sorcerer, who was converted to Christ, but then fell back into the desires of his old trade. Peter will tell him, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). It will be Peter whom the Lord will use to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Peter will become an elder in the church (1 Pet. 5:3). He will write two epistles in God's Holy Book, the Bible.

CONCLUSION

There are many other accomplishments of Peter recorded in the Bible. In the book of Acts alone, the name *Peter* is mention 57 times. Remember this is after he had denied the Lord, but had been converted.

Just think of all the good that the Lord accomplished through Peter! Think of all the people that were saved and edified because of Peter. All of this tells us—“**do not give up!**” “**Keep on keeping on!**” We have a Savior who loves us and desires our salvation. The question is not so much “What if we sin,” but “What do we do when we sin?” We can give up and throw up our hands in despair or we can “be converted and strengthen thy brethren.” May we all find great encouragement from the statement: “But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you” (Mark 16:7).

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“GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD”

JOHN 3:16

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INTRODUCTION

Probably our text is the most often memorized and quoted Scripture in the Bible. Certainly it is one of the Bible's most beautiful, sublime, and profound verses. Some have labeled it the “golden text” of the Bible. Who among those who believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible would argue to the contrary? However, most of those who quote it have no idea of what it teaches. Many quote it in an attempt to prove the false doctrine of salvation by “faith only.” Others quote it, thinking they are proving that God's love is so great for lost man that He will save them no matter what they (mankind) believe or practice. Some quote it because it sounds good and gives them a good, warm, and *fuzzy* feeling. Such Romantic souls are not much interested in a study of the real meaning of this or any other passage of Scripture. They are looking for joy without and beyond evidence and reason.

John 3:16 must be understood by the meaning of the words that compose it without reading into it preconceived notions. The immediate context in which it is found, as well as other Scriptures that discuss the same theme (remote context), must also be considered in the

process of understanding the verse. This is a principle or rule of hermeneutics that is fundamental to any effort to understand the Scriptures. John 3:16 is a part of what our Lord said to Nicodemus after teaching him about the “new birth” (John 3:1-8). In these verses Jesus made it clear that one must be born of water and Spirit to enter the Kingdom of God (3:5). With verse 16 Jesus begins to emphasize the fact that the world was lost and condemned. In other words, the world was in need of a Savior before Christ came. However, His salvation is conditional—it is only for those who submit to His authority (John 3:16-21; also see John 14:6; 3:5; Mark 16:16; 8:24; Mat. 28:18; Heb. 5:8-9; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

More specifically, in His remarks to Nicodemus, Jesus was trying to get the Jewish mind to understand that in the coming age being a descendent of Abraham through Jacob and a keeper of the Law of Moses would be insufficient to save anyone. The age of the Jews and the Law of Moses was about to end. The Law of Moses had accomplished that for which it was intended (Rom. 7:13; Gal. 3:27). Unless they could be brought to an obedient faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth they would be lost regardless of their faithfulness to God under Moses’ law. Though briefly stated, these comments help us see the context of John 3:16 and the burden of much of the preaching of John the Immerser, Christ, His apostles, and the early evangelists of the first century A.D. as they worked to convert the Jews to Christ. Let us now study the verse.

THE VERSE ANALYZED

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).

“For God So Loved”

For is a conjunction. The Greek word is *gar*, and is employed to explain the material preceding it. Originally, that information (found in verse 15) comes from Numbers 21:3-9. It is the account of the fiery serpents God sent among the Jews to punish them because they murmured against Him. The emphasis is on the salvation provided for them when they **looked** on the brazen serpent that God commanded Moses to erect in the midst of the camp. (There is no salvation by “faith only” here. They had to do something—look on the brazen serpent—to be saved.) According to God’s justice the Jews deserved their punishment.

These Jews represent men lost in sin. To be cured (representing forgiveness of sins) from the snake poison it was necessary for our Heavenly Father to exercise His divine love and grace toward and for the good of the Jews who did not deserve it (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). God's provision for the cure of the snakebite pre-figured the salvation from sin that only God could and can provide (Rom. 15:4; John 3:14-15; 1 Cor. 10:9-11). The snake-bitten people could not by their own power alone save themselves from the snake venom any more than sinners by their own power alone save themselves from their sins. However, they could accept God's love, grace, and mercy by faithful obedience to His commands. Thereby they were cured from the snake poison (Heb. 5:9). In like manner, sinful man is saved by grace through faith today (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 3:26-27).

God as employed by John in verse 16 has reference to the First Person of the Godhead—the Father (John 1:14). In general *God* means the singular Divine Essence. One Deity is synonymous with the one God. However, since the Son is He who is given by God, the term references the Father, the first person of the Godhead. He bears all the marks of Deity in His essence and attributes—He who was, is and ever shall be the Almighty (Psa. 90:2; 93:2; Isa. 26:4). He is the great “I am” (Exo. 3:14). The very essence of His being is love (1 John 4:8). Jesus said, “None *is* good, save one, *that is*, God [Deity]” (Luke 18:19).

So emphasizes the immeasurable extent of God's love. “So” translates the Greek word *houtos*. It shows intensity or degree. God's love is intense and active—He gave His Son to save lost mankind. Thus, James wrote, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam. 1:17). Paul, therefore, penned that we should not despise “the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering” (Rom. 2:4).

“The World”

Since the Greek word for “world” is *cosmos* and the object of God's love is not rocks, dirt, trees, and animals, but man who is made in God's moral and rational image (Gen. 1:26); the emphasis is on the universality of God's love. Thus, “world [*cosmos*]” is a figure of speech known as metonymy—something is put for something else. In this case “the world” is put for its inhabitants. It is man who has sinned

and is in need of salvation (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Of God’s love (*agape* and *agapao*—noun and verb forms respectively), Vine states it:

expresses the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the Giver, and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver (21).

God’s love for lost mankind reaches into “eternity past” and finds its culmination and climax at Calvary. Thus, this love is one amazing unified act in God’s mind leading to eternal life in heaven for all those who avail themselves of the everlasting benefits of it.

God’s love precedes man’s love for Him (Rom. 5:8-10; 1 John 4:19). His love seeks the highest good of its object—mankind. Love delivers salvation to man and authors a system that is complete for preparing and finally delivering him in a glorified body into the very presence of God (1 The. 4:17; 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:42-58). God’s love acted out of concern for others. In this case, He authored a plan whereby all sinful persons would have the opportunity to be saved from their sins.

“Calvinism” has as one of its tenets the doctrine that God arbitrarily determined to save some and damn others. Therefore, according to the false doctrine of “Calvinism,” man has no choice regarding his salvation or damnation. John 3:16 along with the rest of the Bible, stands categorically opposed to this damnable doctrine. Indeed, God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). God’s Lamb, Jesus Christ, is the one that “taketh away the sin of the world” and thereby He made salvation possible for all men (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; Tit. 2:11).

“That He Gave His Only Begotten Son”

For man, what is the gift of the Father’s love? It is in the Greek, *ton huion ton monogene*. Literally translated it is rendered: “The Son the only begotten.” The Father has only one Son who was literally born of the Father. The Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin, Mary, begot Him. Thus, He became flesh (John 1:14; Mat. 1:18; Luke 1:31-32, 35). He is, therefore, a “one of a kind” son. *Monogenes* from *Monos* (only, alone) and *genos* (race, stock) is rendered “only begotten.” Of course, the Father has many *tekna* (children) in His spiritual family (the church) through faith and obedience to the gospel (1 Tim. 3:15; Rom.

1:16; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 8:11; John 3:5; Heb. 5:8-9). However, He has only one *monogene* Son who existed in eternity with Him as the Second Person of the Godhead—the eternal Word, the executor of the Father’s Will, His “fellow” (John 1:1ff; Col. 1:14-21; Zec. 13:7) (Vincent, 2:53).

Jesus became the Son of God when He was begotten of the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary (John 1:14). Hence, by the prophets, the angels, the Father, our Lord Himself, His disciples, His enemies, and by His resurrection from the dead, Christ is declared to be the Son of God (Isa. 9:6; Luke 1:32; Mat. 3:17; Mark 14:62; Mat. 16:16; Mat. 27:54; Rom. 1:4). There was no greater gift for the Father to give to lost mankind than one of the Godhead three—who became Jesus of Nazareth: the Christ. With the apostle Paul we declare, “Thanks *be* unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).

We would do well to remember that the Father did not become flesh; neither did the Holy Spirit. Such was not their *assigned* work in the redemption of man. “Becoming flesh” was the responsibility of the Executor of the Godhead three—the Eternal Word who became the Incarnate Word, our blessed Savior, Jesus the Christ (Phi. 2:5-11).

“That Whosoever Believeth in Him”

God “will have all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4). Nicodemus along with all Jews needed to understand this great truth. *Whosoever* is as broad as the race of mankind. It means everyone. Thus, the gospel is to be preached to the whole world or to every creature (Mark 16:15; 2 Tim. 2:2). We, therefore, do not marvel that in finishing the Last Will and Testament of Jesus Christ, as inspiration’s pen was about to be finally laid down, the apostle John wrote, “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17; Also see Tit. 2:11-12). The Jews should have learned the preceding scriptural fact long before the time our Lord came into the world.

Jonah’s Mission—Proof of God’s Love for the Gentiles as Well as the Jews

The book of Jonah makes it clear that the man Jonah, a Jew, who approached God through the Law of Moses, was selected by God to preach to the Gentile sinners of Nineveh (capital city of Assyria and enemy of Israel). The fact that they were sinners in need of repentance

implies that they had broken some Law of God (1 John 3:4). While the Jews were serving God under the Law of Moses, the Gentiles continued to serve God under the Patriarchal Law. Remember the Law of Moses was given only to the Jews (Deu. 5:15; Rom. 9:4). Jonah's commission from God to preach repentance to the Gentile people of Nineveh proves His love for the Gentiles: for He desired their salvation. Jonah did not desire to preach to the people of Nineveh. This was the case because, along with most Jews, he had a warped concept concerning what it meant to be one of God's "chosen people," God's love for all men, the design and purpose of Moses' Law, and the nature of the Messiah and His Kingdom. Jonah knew that if the inhabitants of Nineveh repented God would forgive them. Such did not appeal to Jonah's bigoted and prejudiced mind. As with many people, Jonah had to learn this lesson the hard way.

Many years later these same misconceptions confronted Jesus in His earthly Ministry among the Jews. Indeed, approximately ten years after its establishment it took miracles to cause the church of Christ to understand that the Gospel was for the uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 10-11).

Concerning the fact that the Gentiles were always in God's scheme of redemption, Paul wrote to the church in Rome the following material.

Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.... 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 Ghost.... For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:8-12, 16, 18-19).

To become a believer in Christ is an indispensable step in God's Plan of Salvation, but it is not the **only** step (John 8:24). In John 3:16 "believeth" translates the Greek word *pisteuo*. *Pisteuo* does not mean

only to mentally assent to the historical fact that Jesus Christ is God's Son, sinful man's Savior. It involves mental assent, but carries with it very much more. *Pisteuo* also carries with it the idea of compliance. It is the opposite of *apisteuo* which means to refuse to comply. In other words, inherent in the meaning of *pisteuo* is the idea of obedience. In this verse *believeth* renders a present tense participle. The literal translation of which is "the keeping on believing ones." The meaning is that the person who "keeps on believing" in Jesus will have eternal life. This is the case because such a person is on the road to salvation, and if he/she continues to believe he/she will complete the other steps necessary for the accomplishing of his/her salvation.

In his Greek lexicon Thayer says of the Greek word *pisteuo* that it is

used especially of the faith by which a man embraces Jesus, i.e. a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, conjoined with obedience to Christ (See Heb. 5:9) (511).

The faith that saves is, therefore, the faith that obeys. A faith that does not obey is a dead faith and, therefore, useless regarding one's salvation (Jam. 2:14-26).

“Should Not Perish”

The phrase does not say that the believer will not perish. It states that the believer *should* not perish. Obviously, then, is the fact as previously stated that this verse does not teach salvation by "faith only" or, for that matter, salvation by anything *only*. Also, it most assuredly does not teach the impossibility of apostasy.

Perish does not refer to physical death, for death is appointed for all men—saint and sinner (Heb. 9:27). Neither does it mean that the wicked will be annihilated—go out of existence. *Perish* refers to divine eternal condemnation. Such a person perishes because he/she is forever separated from God and all that such separation implies. "Perish" translates *apollumi*. Of it Vine states, "The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being" (302). Thayer states that *apollumi* carries with it the idea "to be delivered up to eternal misery" (64) (See Mat. 25:46; 2 The.1:7-9). This lost condition is eternal death (separation from God and the consequences of such a separation—Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14).

“But Have Everlasting Life”

Everlasting life pertains to the eternal life of the saved in heaven. The emphasis is on the never-ending quality of life, not mere duration. Souls in hell have eternal existence, but they do not have eternal or everlasting life. Hence, in contrast to the miserable eternal state of the lost, Jesus offers to all who will obey Him a state described as one of glory, rest and, happiness (Rom. 2:10; 2 Cor. 4:17; Heb. 4:11; Mat. 25:21). Flawless fellowship and communion will exist without end with the saved and the God who saved them. There will be no possibility of sin. Thus, there can be no consequences of sin. Such things belong to this life, and when eternity dawns, all the things peculiar to this world will have forever vanished.

GOD’S SAVING GRACE AND JOHN 3:16

We may learn much about how and when God’s grace saved us from our alien sins through the proper application of what we have studied. Grace means the unmerited favor of God. Man does not deserve salvation, and he cannot obligate God to cause or force Him to bestow salvation on sinful man. Paul wrote, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). With these thoughts in mind we learn from John 3:16 that God’s grace involves a giver, a gift, and a receiver. Motivated by love, God the Father **gave** the **gift** of His one of a kind Son to save lost man, the **receiver** and object of His love. Therefore, we understand that there are two sides to man’s salvation—the divine and the human side. The divine side or God’s part in our salvation always has to do with God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. However, God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. Thus, there is man’s part in his own salvation. Therefore, God and man have parts to play in man’s salvation from sin.

THE FATHER’S GIFT OF LOVE (GOD’S SIDE OR PART IN MAN’S SALVATION)

Let us look at what God has done for man and will do for the saved that he (man) cannot do for himself. God created mankind in His own image (His moral and intellectual likeness), endowing him with free will (Gen. 1:26-27; Jos. 24:15). God’s love, mercy, and grace provided the Christ who became flesh (John 1:14). He lived a sinless life (Heb. 4:15). He proved that He was/is God’s Son by the miracles He did

among men (John 20:30-31). He suffered on Calvary's cross and shed His blood to purchase the church (Luke 24:46; Acts 3:18; 20:28). He died for our sins (willed Himself to die) on the cross and was buried (John 19:30, 40-42). Early on the third day of His burial He rose from the dead to die no more and thereby overcame death and the grave (Luke 24:1-9). He ascended back to His Heavenly Home where He now sits ruling on His Father's right hand (Acts 1:9-11; 2:33-36). Thereon Jesus mediates and intercedes for the church He built, which church began on the first Pentecost following His resurrection from the dead (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25; Acts 2). He chose apostles as His official ambassadors from the court of Heaven. Christ endowed the apostles through the agency of the Holy Spirit with miraculous powers that only they could do to prove that the Gospel they spoke was truly from Heaven and not from men (John 16:13, 26-27; Acts 1:21-26; Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:10-11). While the New Testament was being revealed, Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the laying on of the apostles hands, endowed members of the first century church with miraculous gifts to guide them in the absence of the completed New Testament (Acts 8:5-6, 12-19; 19:1-6; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11-14). Thereby, he gave mankind the New Testament, His last Will and Testament, to lead, guide, and direct men from earth to Heaven (as well as the whole Bible—2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jam. 1:25; 2 Pet. 1:2-4; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1-12). At the end of this present age He will come again (1 Cor. 15:23-28; 2 The. 1:6-10; Mat. 24:36-42, 44). When Christ comes He will raise the dead, both the saved and unsaved (Mat. 25:31-46). He will judge the world with God's Word as His standard of Judgment (John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10-11). He will pronounce condemnation on those who never obeyed the Gospel and those who are fallen from grace (John 5:25-29). The Lord will pronounce a sentence of eternal glory and blessing on those who faithfully served Him all the days of their life on earth (Mat. 25:34, 41). In resurrected glorified bodies such as His own, He will take the saved into glory in Heaven with Him (1 Cor. 15:35-50; 1 John 3:1-3). Therein the church shall know no pain, heartache, disappointment, sickness, dying, wars, or any kind of evil, tribulation, or parting. In bliss eternal they shall know joy unspeakable, world without end (2 Pet. 1:1-11; Rev. 7:13-17; 21:1-7).

All these things God has done and will do for man because man cannot do them for himself!

THE AVENUE OR MEANS WHEREBY GOD'S GRACE REACHES MAN

Revealed in John 3:16 is the fact that God's great free gift of His Son was/is for the eternal good of mankind—to save man from his sins. Moreover, man would know nothing about his need of salvation and God's gift, the Son of His love without the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17). However, the Bible does much more for man than merely inform him of his lost condition and the gift of God's love, which gift makes possible man's salvation. Our concern is **how does God's saving grace (what God has done for man regarding his salvation which he cannot merit, that he could never do for himself, and he does not deserve) reach man?** The answer to the question is a simple one—**God's grace reaches man through the rule or avenue of law.** Paul wrote, "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). This information is a death knell to the false teachers who advocate and propagate that salvation is all of grace and that where grace reigns there is no law. Indeed, without God's Law there is no sin, for sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4).

The inspired Paul explicitly stated that **grace reigns through righteousness.** The preposition *through* means that grace reaches man through some sort of conveyance or means. Grace is conveyed to man by means of righteousness. Indeed, since we know that all of God's commandments are righteousness (Psa. 119:172), **we may correctly deduce that God's grace reigns or rules in man through His commandments.** Let me emphasize that without God's commandments His saving grace cannot reach man!

The question is, **what specific commandments of God serve as the avenue or means through which God's grace and the salvation it brings, reaches or is conveyed to man?** Certainly the means whereby God's grace reaches man is not the Law of Moses. In discussing the design and purpose of the Mosaic law, Paul wrote, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Furthermore, man cannot save himself by any law he might devise (Eph. 2:8-9). Indeed, Eph. 2:8 clearly points out that God's saving grace reaches man through faith. But, faith is created in man by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Now, before we determine what specific

commandments of God serve as the avenue through which God's saving grace travels to reach lost man, let us pause and summarize what we have learned thus far about how God's saving grace reaches man.

1. Grace reaches man through God's commandments.
2. The commandments through which grace travels are not a part the Law of Moses.
3. Any humanly contrived law cannot save man.
4. God's grace saves man through faith.
5. God's Word creates saving faith in man.

With these points well set in our minds, we note the following Scriptures pertaining to just what commandments of God serve as the avenue through which God's saving grace reaches sinful man. The same inspired apostle who declared that grace reigns or rules through righteousness also penned: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). Moreover, Paul also wrote of "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), and James urged men to look into and continue in the "perfect law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25). To the Corinthians Paul emphatically declared that we are "under the law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21). **It does not take an inspired man to correctly conclude that it is the New Testament of Christ or the Word of Christ that serves as the avenue of grace or the commandments through which God's saving grace reaches us.** No wonder that Paul declared that the gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). Furthermore, the gospel is to be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15), and that all who do not obey the gospel will be lost (2 The. 1:8). Thus, God is the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey him (Heb. 5:9).

THE RECIPIENT OF GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE (MAN'S SIDE OR PART IN HIS OWN SALVATION)

Thus we see that, as the recipient of all God has done for him that he never could do for himself, man has a part to play in his own salvation. God will not do for man what man can do for himself. Therefore, man must use his God-given faculties to find God and learn His Will (Mat. 6:33; 7:7). He must reason correctly from the adequate evidence and credible witnesses that comprise the Gospel or Law of Christ—the Word of Christ (1 The. 5:21; John 20:30-31). In his examination of his life in the light of God's Truth, man must be sure that he has an honest and good heart (Luke 8:15). Furthermore, man

must hunger and thirst after God's righteousness—God's commandments (Mat. 5:6; Psa. 119:172). And, when he learns God's Will he must be determined to do it (John 7:17). Indeed, even man's belief in Christ as his Savior is a work of God (John 6:29). How is this the case? Because when one complies with another's will, he is performing the work of the person with whose will he has complied. Such is the case regarding anything God's Will, Word, Commandments, or Law enjoins upon man.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we have learned that in John 3:16, when the apostle wrote, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," he was speaking of God's unmerited favor (grace), that which God has done for man that man could never do for himself. Furthermore, when we read, "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," we know that he was speaking of that part of God's salvation that involves what man can and must do for himself to be saved, which things God will not do for him. Moreover, man's reception of God's free gift of salvation is through his belief and obedience to God's Word (Mat. 7:21; Luke 6:46-49). Therefore, Paul wrote to Titus saying, "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" (Tit. 2:11-12). Indeed Christ brought the gospel, His power to save lost man (Rom. 1:16). Such a thing man could not do, so God did it for him. (Such is also true regarding the whole Bible.) However, man must exercise his God-given intellectual and rational powers along with his free will to learn, choose, and obey the Truth of the Gospel (Rom. 6:17; 10:16; 2 The. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:17; Phi. 2:12). Thus, Peter reveals, "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40).

We have learned there is a Divine side and a human side involved in man's salvation. It is the Bible that bridges the chasm separating Deity from humanity. More specifically, it is through the New Testament of the Christ that God's reaches down His arm of salvation. Furthermore, it is only through belief and obedience to the Gospel that man takes hold of God's hand of grace; thus, allowing God to save him (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10; Eph. 4:23; Col. 1:18). What a

simple but powerful plan whereby God's grace reaches man! How sad that men work so hard to corrupt it rather than believe and obey it.

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“BE OF GOOD CHEER; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD”

JOHN 16:33

Kent Bailey



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The words of Christ, as recorded in John 14-16, are indeed proper encouragement for all of God's faithful. As we note these particular passages, we conclude that the Lord's followers would have their faith tried in the crucible of tribulation, yet by faithfulness to His cause, be victorious over the world.

The clarity of thought expressed in the Lord's farewell address is appreciated even by members of the New Testament church today in that we note the same divine truths that apply today in dealing with the trials that we face. In light of the precious promises made by the only begotten Son of God, Christians today endure trials and look with great anticipation to glory in the hereafter.

Our Lord stated:

Let not your heart be troubled: 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; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a

place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also. And whither I go, ye know the way. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:1-6).

What Christ stated regarding His departure is identical to what we recall in the time of departure from those that we love and hold dear in our hearts. How deeply troubled were the thoughts of His followers! Their sorrow over the prediction made by our Lord, in addition to the dreadful prospect before them, were almost more than they could withstand. Their only pillar of support was their determination to die with and for the Christ. As the situation developed, even this particular determination had been shaken by our Lord's prediction of betrayal by one of their own number and desertion by all. Such a night of fear and doubt brought forth words of comfort and trust that have supported all of the Lord's faithful through the ages (Foster, 1222).

Guy N. Woods correctly observed:

The sorrow, the uncertainty, the agitation of mind the disciples experienced was common to all of them and thus the word "heart" is singular embracing the seat of intelligence of them all. It is a synonym for the mind—that faculty of man which reasons, intends and believes (Rom. 10:10). Events already taking shape about them sorely troubled (*tarassoo*) them, and the words of Jesus in John 13:38 must have greatly increased their agitation. They were trouble by the uncertainties which forced them, by the confusion they experienced regarding the cause with which they were associated and which now appeared to be taking a course which could not possibly enable them to realize their longings and expectations for a temporal reign of Messiah on an earthly throne in Jerusalem; by the knowledge that their master and Lord was soon to be taken from them; by the number and determination of their enemies—the unbelieving Jews—by the betrayal of one of their number and the predicted denial of the Lord by another; it is, indeed, impossible for us fully to comprehend the mental distress and agitation of heart which overwhelmed them in that sad hour. The sacred historian made an attempt to describe the audible and visible evidence of the sorrow and grief which must have exhibited itself in bitter crying and tears, which convulsed the disciples in that upper room, in the realization that soon the Lord they loved would be taken from their midst and slain.

They were to be comforted by their faith in the Father and in the Son whom the Father had sent to be the Saviour of the world. There is no other way to support and solace in the hour of sorrow. Comfort comes through faith in deity because he loves us and seeks for us only that

which is best for us (John 3:16,17; 17:23); he controls the world and thus is able to make all things work out for our good (Rom. 8:28); he is stronger than all our enemies and he provides us with the means and the way by which to resist all evil (1 Cor. 10:13). Belief in God must involve belief in Christ, because it is only through Christ that it is possible to reach the Father (John 14:6) (301-302).

Additional words of encouragement were spoken by Christ:

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

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, *these* shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you (John 16:13-14).

These words of Christ were spoken exclusively to the apostles concerning their reception of divine truth by means of God's plenary verbal inspiration. This divine assistance would:

1. Teach them all things and particularly, those matters they were not capable at that particular moment of receiving.
2. Enable them to recall the things Jesus had taught them during His personal ministry on earth.

When individuals seek to make a direct application of these passages today rather than limiting the application to exclusively the apostles, such is a total disregard of the context and proper rules of both exegesis and biblical interpretation.

The fulfillment of the sending of the Holy Spirit in both John 14 and 16 began to be realized on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ as recorded in Acts 2; it continued so long as the Holy Spirit both revealed and confirmed God's divine truth:

But as it is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, And which entered not into the heart of man, Whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:9-13).

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away *from them*. For if the word spoken through angels proved stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will (Heb. 2:1-4)?

And that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

In noting these verses of Scripture we find that though the physical presence of Christ would no longer be with the apostles, they would, however, they would be edified by means of the Holy Spirit's inspiration in giving them God's divine truth (Woods, 316-317). To allege, as some do today, for a supra-literary influence of the Word of God implies that the Bible is neither materially, nor informationally sufficient. To argue that the Bible is informationally sufficient, yet call for an additional direct influence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the faithful Christian "in conjunction with the Word of God" falsely presupposes that deity provides understanding and enlightenment other than through that of information. In view of the foregoing information Christians today can rejoice in the words of Christ, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

CHRIST HAS MADE PROVISIONS THAT IN HIM WE MAY HAVE PEACE

It is truly remarkable that in the very shadow of the cross our Lord would speak of peace. In earnest consideration of the terrible suffering He would face, Christ spoke with reference to a type of peace that was indeed unparalleled among humanity. The type of peace under consideration here does not come as the result of worldly contentment, but rather is that of peace of mind and tranquillity of the soul. By plenary verbal inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul wrote:

Wherefore, my brethren beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved. I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea, I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice. Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus (Phi. 4:1-7).

As we especially note verse four of this particular context, there are four major points that we logically ascertain:

1. True peace comes only from God.
2. It surpasses our comprehension.
3. This peace guards our thinking process, i.e., the heart and mind.
4. Such is available to those who are "in Christ" (Jackson, 107-108).

"Peace" is derived from the Greek term *eirene*. While the etymology of the word is obscure, some scholars suggest that it may possibly relate to the term *erein*, which is translated "to weave together." "Peace" (*eirene*) in the New Testament, is used in three particular ways:

1. It has to do with the concept of reconciliation that one may enjoy with God resulting from the supreme sacrifice of Christ and our obedience to the gospel terms of pardon (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:15; Col. 1:20; Heb. 5:8-9).
2. Peace represents that ideal state or condition of tranquillity that is enjoyed in a particular relationship such as a family, community, or friendship (Rom. 12:18; Heb. 12:14).
3. Peace is that particular condition of mind that makes terrible situations of life bearable. Such is independent of afflictions, worldly trials, and even persecutions (Jackson, 108).

The apostle Paul noted:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you. But I

rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me; wherein ye did indeed take thought, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me (Phi. 4:8-13).

Again, for emphasis we underscore that the peace provided by Christ “that passeth all understanding” is found in the fellowship of Christ. When one accepts the historicity and Deity of Christ (John 8:24), repents of sin (Acts 17:30), and upon the confession of Christ (Rom. 10:10) is baptized for the remission of past alien sins to be added to the one true New Testament church (Acts 2:38-47), one will then, and only then enjoy the blessings of salvation and the promise of divine peace. As the fallen child of God repents of covenant sins and confesses such to the Lord in prayer (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-10); our loving Heavenly Father restores the promise of spiritual peace to this returning child. As the faithful Christian continues to “walk in the light as Christ is in the light,” we will continue to enjoy the promise of continued fellowship with God in addition to the presence of His divine peace.

CHRIST HAS WARNED US THAT IN THE WORLD WE WILL HAVE TRIBULATION

Affliction and tribulation to the non-Christian and unfaithful child of God is not only unwelcome, but also dreaded and execrated. Such conflicts with ideas of happiness and stands diametrically opposed to worldliness and the temporal affairs of life in the world. When one understands the essence of materialism one will note that such is based upon the false concept of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Such thinking is fatally flawed in that it places the effect in place of the cause. The greatest good that can be accomplished is that of obedience to the revealed will of God. Then and only then can one truly enjoy peace of mind and true happiness.

The enduring of trial and tribulation when borne in divine strength, imparted by the indwelling Word of God, tends to brace our resolve and strengthen one’s soul as demonstrated by various New Testament examples:

By words of inspiration James noted: Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (Jam. 1:21).

The apostle Peter observed:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: but insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy. If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are ye*; because the *Spirit* of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you. For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters: but if *a man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

The apostle Paul best typified this fundamental truth when he wrote:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as one beside himself) I more; in labors more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, 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 have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

The tribulation and suffering which faithful Christians are required to endure, for the most part, are those which arise either from the nature of things, as at present constituted, such as bereavement, sickness, or from the present evil world, the world of evil men inimical to Christ and the New Testament pattern, and therefore to His followers. This world is the one which, "by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23) the Lord Himself. And as He stated to His followers, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). However, He did not leave them to wonder if tribulation and suffering were without their rewards; for among our Lord's concluding words to His faithful were those full of comfort (Scott, 25:470-471).

**REGARDLESS OF THE COST OF COMING SUFFERING
AND TRIBULATION, CHRIST STATED, “BE OF GOOD
CHEER; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD”**

As we consider the text of this particular chapter, we note the significance of the fact that our Lord did not state, “Ye have overcome the world; therefore, peace is yours.” This promise (“Be of good cheer”) was true because of our Lord’s own accomplishment. While indeed such is the case that Christians must overcome the world in resisting and avoiding temptations, there must first, however, have been this initial triumph over it by Christ Himself; otherwise salvation would not have been possible, regardless of any resistance to its evil influences. The triumph over the world by the Lord Himself was therefore also that of His followers (Woods, 351).

John, the apostle, noted:

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error (1 John 4:4-6).

Such ability to overcome the world necessitates a holy life style. Paul observed:

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret (Eph. 5:1-12).

Because Christ conquered, we as Christians can also conquer sin in our own personal lives. Because Christ conquered Satan, we can also conquer him as well:

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? 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:1-11).

By our faith in Christ and obedience to the gospel we die unto sin and become alive unto God:

Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 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 (Rom. 6:13-18).

Presupposed upon our faith in Christ, repentance of personal sin, confession of the Deity of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins is the initial victory we enjoy in Christ! By continuing to walk in the light of God's truth we sustain our victory and have the promise of eternal life (1 John 1:7-10; 2:25). Because Christ did indeed overcome the world, we as Christians can accomplish the same. The question is thus raised: "But how is such accomplished"?

1. By overcoming Satan.
2. By rejecting the world's value judgments.

3. By willingness to endure the worst of treatment and not compromise.
4. By refusing to yield to the temptation of lust and pride.
5. By living a life of total innocence and holiness and at the same time a life of power and authority.

While we will never attain total sinlessness, we can, through Christ, overcome the world by means of the “indwelling word.”

We conclude our thoughts regarding this important study in the words of the late Guy N. Woods written as a conclusion in his commentary on the gospel of John. Brother Woods sought to underscore the importance of the power of the indwelling Word of Christ:

And so, on this day of July 4, 1980 I have written the last word of commentary on this remarkable testimony of John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” to the deity Messiahship of Jesus. For many months I have been in such close association with John and with him whom he so vividly and lovingly describes that, at times I have felt that I was being privileged to see, to hear and to enter into the very heart of the living breathing Saviour of the world and to know him and his mission far better than ever I have before. If I have been able, in any degree, to open up in these pages a higher, nobler view of our blessed Redeemer and Lord than any reader has thus far had I shall be amply repaid for the labor of love this effort has required (448).

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NOTHING SEPARATES US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD

ROMANS 8:31-39

David B. Watson



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THEME AND THESIS

The theme for these lectures is *Encouraging Statements Of The Bible*. The thesis for this particular lecture is "Nothing Separates Us From The Love Of God; Romans 8:31-39." The passage reads as follows in the King James Version of the Bible:

What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

TREATMENT

My treatment of this theme and thesis will consist of the following points: (1) Seven Propositions; (2) A Sacred Passage; (3) A Solemn Pronouncement.

INTRODUCTION

Cambron (178) divides Romans as follows:

- I. The Discourse (1:1-3:20)
- II. The Doctrine (3:21-8:39)
 - A. Pardon For The Sinner (3:21-4:25)
 - B. Peace Of The Believer (5:1-5:21)
 - C. Power Of The Overcomer (6:1-8:39)
 1. Present Conflict (6:1-8:17)
 2. Prospective Conquest (8:18-39)
 - a. Plight of the Universe (8:18-25)
 - b. Plea of the Spirit (8:26-27)
 - c. Plan of the Lord (8:28-34)
 - d. Protection of the Believer (8:35-39)
- III. The Deviation (9:1-11:36)
- IV. The Dedication (12:1-16:27)

As Paul discusses the “Plan of the Lord” and the “Protection of the Believer,” he sets forth: (1) seven propositions in the form of questions (Rom. 8:31-35), (2) a passage from the Old Testament (Rom. 8:36), and (3) a solemn pronouncement (Rom. 8:37-39).

SEVEN PROPOSITIONS

Proposition/Question One: “What shall we then say to these things?” (Rom. 8:31).

As Paul discusses the “Power of the Overcomer” (Rom. 6:1-8:39) and ends his discussion of the “Present Conflict” (Rom. 6:1-8:17), he speaks of suffering when he says: “that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:16-17). Then, as Paul begins his discussion of the “Prospective Conquest,” he says: “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” (Rom. 8:18). As brother Roy Deaver states: “He encourages Christians to endure the present sufferings confidently, looking forward to the ‘glory which shall be revealed.’” (*Romans*,

293). Thus, hurtings can help us. Paul also discusses hope, saying: “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*” (Rom. 8:24-25). Thus, hope helps us. Finally, Paul discusses the Holy Spirit. He says: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26). Thus, the Holy Spirit helps us.

After discussing how hurtings, hope, and the Holy Spirit can help us, he makes a most marvelous statement: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28). He avers that everything in the life of a faithful Christian is for his good and God’s glory. Romans 8:28, according to the late brother Andrew Connally, presents four laws of providence: (1) The Law of Operation—“*All things work*”; (2) The Law of Cooperation—“*All things work together*”; (3) The Law of Compensation—“*All things work together for good*”; (4) The Law of Limitation—“*All things work together for good to them that love God*” (482-490). The “all things” of Romans 8:28 connects with “these things” of Romans 8:31. Thus, when Paul asks “What shall we then say to these things?” the phrase *these things*, in context, is referring to how hurtings, hope, and the Holy Spirit helps us. However, Paul is not done yet. As Paul ends his discussion of the “Plea of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:26-27) and begins his discussion of the “Plan of the Lord” (Rom. 8:28-34), at the end of Romans 8:28 he mentions God’s *purpose*. *Purpose* means “a setting forth of a thing, placing of it in view” (Strong). Passages to read and study include Romans 3:25; 8:28; Ephesians 1:9-11; 3:10-11; and 2 Timothy 1:9. From these passages we learn that God, in eternity, before the world began, set before Himself the plan/scheme of redemption. This plan/scheme of redemption involves salvation/remission of sins through Jesus Christ in the church of Christ by the gospel of Christ for those that love God and for those who are the called according to His purpose.

Paul then discussed how that everything works for their good and God’s glory. It is through: (1) God’s Foreknowledge (Rom. 8:28); (2) God’s Predestination (Rom. 8:29-30); (3) God’s Calling (Rom.

8:30); (4) God's Justification (Rom. 8:30); and, (5) God's Glorification (Rom. 8:30).

First: "The meaning of the word foreknowledge is obvious—it means the possession of information concerning an event prior to its occurrence, knowledge in advance, knowledge of the future" (McClish, 161). Passages to read and study include Romans 8:29; Acts 2:23; and 1 Peter 1:2, 20. From these passages we learn that Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for us. We learn that by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Christ was delivered, taken, crucified, and slain. We also learn that through Christ and His sacrifice we can be elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Second, *predestinate* means "to predetermine, decide beforehand... to foreordain, appoint beforehand" (Strong). Passages to read and study include Romans 8:29-30, 1 Corinthians 2:6-13, and Ephesians 1:5, 11. From these passages we learn that for those foreknown (the elect) it was predetermined that they must be conformed to the image of God's Son. We also learn that to that end they were called. We further learn that God ordained, before the world, to issue the call through the inspired words of the gospel of Christ. Finally we learn that those answering this call were/are predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ according to His will, and they have, as God's children, obtained an inheritance according to God's purpose.

Third, *called* means "to be called...invited" (Strong). Passages to read and study include Romans 1:6-7; 8:28-30, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, 2 Timothy 1:9, and Jude 1. From these passages we learn that God calls by the gospel and hath from the beginning chosen the called to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We learn that God hath saved us and called us with an holy calling according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. We learn that the called of Jesus Christ are called to be saints, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ.

Fourth, *justify* means "to declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous" (Strong). Alexander Campbell ascribed justification to seven

causes (216). He wrote: “It is God that justifies (Rom. 8:33), viz.: by these seven means.” He then listed them (though not in this order) as follows: (1) Grace (Rom. 3:24; Tit. 3:7); (2) Christ (Gal. 2:16); (3) The name of the Lord Jesus (and we would add that the passage also says “by the Spirit of our God”—1 Cor. 6:11); (4) His blood (Rom. 5:9); (5) Knowledge (Isa. 53:11); (6) Faith (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24); and (7) Works (Jam. 2:21, 24-25). Romans 8:30 tells us that those whom God called (invited), them He also justified (declared just or righteous). Thus, God calls us by the gospel. Those called must obey the gospel. Obedience to the gospel involves faith/belief (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24; Mark 16:16) which comes by hearing the gospel (Rom. 10:17). Obedience to the gospel involves repentance (Acts 17:30-31; Luke 13:3-5) and confession of faith (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:37). Obedience to the gospel involves baptism into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27), into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:41-47), which is the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), for the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16) by the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5). Those who obey the gospel are saved/justified by the grace of God, by Christ, by the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, by the blood of Christ, by the knowledge of the gospel, by faith, and by these works of obedience.

Fifth, *glorified* means “to make glorious, adorn with lustre, clothe with splendor” (Strong). Passages to read and study include Matthew 5:16, 1 Corinthians 15:49, Ephesians 3:21, Philippians 3:20-21, and 1 John 3:2. From these passages we learn that we here on earth are to glorify the Father which is in heaven and that unto God be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. We learn that one day, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, our vile bodies will be changed and fashioned like unto the Saviour’s glorious body and we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. We learn that as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Thus, *these things* in Romans 8:31 include God’s purpose to save us (all men) through Jesus Christ in the church of Christ by the gospel of Christ. *These things* also include God foreknowledge, God’s predestination, God’s calling, God’s justification, and God’s glorification. It is exceedingly encouraging to know that God can and will use hurting to help us, hope to help us, and His Holy Spirit to help us—that

His purpose is for our good through His foreknowledge, through His predestination, through His calling, through His justification, and through His glorification. It is no wonder then that Paul exclaims in absolute amazement: “What shall we then say to these things?” (Rom. 8:31). We can only exclaim, as did the Psalmist: “*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it*” (Psa. 139:6). What now follows is Paul’s answer to this first proposition/question.

Proposition/Question Two: “If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

Notice the evidence that God, the Father, is *for us*.

1. God “loved us” (Rom. 8:37).
2. This “love of God...is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).
3. God sent His own Son (Rom. 8:3), not sparing Him, but delivering Him up *for us* (Rom. 8:32).
4. God also uses sufferings and hurtings to help us on the way to glorification (Rom. 8:17-18).
5. Then, God uses hope to help us on the way to salvation (Rom. 8:24-25).
6. God uses His Holy Spirit to help us in our prayers (Rom. 8:26-27).
7. God purposes our good, if we love Him and are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).
8. God uses His foreknowledge for our good (Rom. 8:29).
9. God uses predestination for our good (Rom. 8:29-30).
10. God calls us for our good (Rom. 8:30).
11. God justifies us for our good (Rom. 8:30).
12. God will glorify us for our good (Rom. 8:30).

In view of these dozen things evidencing that God is for us, when Paul asks “who can be against us?” the answer is “not God the Father.”

Could or would Jesus Christ be against us, if God the Father is for us? No!

1. Jesus Christ also loves us as does God the Father (Rom. 8:35, 37, 39).
2. Christ died for us (Rom. 8:34).
3. Christ was raised for us (Rom. 8:34).
4. Christ is now at God’s right hand for us (Rom. 8:34).
5. Christ is now making intercession for us (Rom. 8:34).

6. To those who are in Christ Jesus there is therefore now no condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

Could or would God's Holy Spirit be against us? No!

1. God's Holy Spirit has given us His governing factor, which is the law of the Spirit, and which can make us free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2).
2. God's Holy Spirit leads us as sons of God by that law (Rom. 8:14).
3. God's Holy Spirit, through that law, can make us spiritually minded (Rom. 8:5-6).
4. God's Holy Spirit can also cause us to walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:4).
5. God's Holy Spirit dwells in us as children of God giving us life (Rom. 8:9-11).
6. God's Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16-17).
7. God's Holy Spirit helps us in our prayers (Rom. 8:26-27).

God the Father will not be against us. God the Son will not be against us. God the Holy Spirit will not be against us.

Could or would God's holy angels be against us? Not according to Jesus, who said, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10).

It is emphatically encouraging to know that God the Father is for us, that Jesus Christ is for us, that the Holy Spirit is for us, that God's holy angels are for us, and that none of these can or will be against us if and as long as we love God by keeping His commandments. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). John said:

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 (1 John 5:2-3).

Proposition/Question Three: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

This third proposition/question contains three points: (1) God spared not His own Son; (2) God delivered Him up for us all; and, (3) God will with Him also freely give us all things.

First, God spared not His own Son. Brother Roy Deaver writes:

In Genesis 22:16 God said to Abraham: “Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son...I will bless thee.”

The word for “withheld” in the Septuagint is the same word translated “spared” here in Romans 8:32. Abraham “withheld not” his only Son—God “spared not” His only Son (*Romans*, 304).

Second, God delivered Him up for us all. Few would deliver up their only son to die for a righteous man. Fewer still would deliver up their only son to die for a good man (Rom. 5:7). Who would then deliver up their only son to die for a sinner? “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Jesus was allowed to be “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” and to be taken “by wicked hands...crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). God delivered Him up for us all because He would have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). But without repentance all will perish (Luke 13:3-5). “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 verse has been called the greatest verse in the Bible. Such is true in the following sense. *God* is the greatest giver/lover. *So loved* indicates the greatest degree. *The world* indicates the greatest company. *That he gave* indicates the greatest act. *His only begotten Son* indicates the greatest gift. *That whosoever* indicates the greatest opportunity. *Believeth* indicates the greatest simplicity. *In him* indicates the greatest attraction. *Should not perish* indicates the greatest promise. *But* indicates the greatest difference. *Have* indicates the greatest certainty. And *everlasting life* indicates the greatest possession.

It is especially encouraging to know that God did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all and that in so doing demonstrated that by giving the greatest gift possible He would with Him freely give us all things. The *all things* of verse 32 connects back with the *all things* of verse 28 and they both connect with *these things* in verse 31.

Proposition/Question Four: “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? *It is* God that justifieth” (Rom. 8:33).

Earlier we pointed out that if any one was/is one of God's elect, then God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and God's holy angels would all be for him/her rather than against. Who would then dare to lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Satan would dare do so. In Roy Deaver's Romans Commentary, he wrote:

The word "charge" signifies accusation, institution of judicial proceedings. In Acts 19:38 the town clerk said: "...the courts are open...let them *accuse* one another." The word is used in connection with the charges against Paul (Acts 23:28-29; 26:2,7). Charges may be hurled, but against God's elect no charge can be sustained (305-306).

Satan hurled charges against Job in the Old Testament. But no charge of Satan could be sustained against Job. Instead, all things worked together for Job's good and God's glory. Job was justified by God. Thus Paul states, "It is God that justifieth" (Rom. 8:33). Indeed He does so by His grace, by His Son Jesus Christ and the name of the Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit of God, by the blood of Jesus Christ, by knowledge, by faith, and by works. It is extremely encouraging to know that no one can lay anything to the charge of God's elect and that it is God that justifieth.

Proposition/Question Five: "Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34).

We have already been told in Romans 8:1-2:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Christians have experienced a spiritual birth (John 3:1-7). Christians are spiritual stones in a spiritual house offering up spiritual sacrifices to God (1 Pet. 2:5). Christians worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Christians are to be spiritually minded (Rom. 8:5-6). So long as Christians are led by/of the Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18), and walk after/in the law of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 5:16), and live after/in the Spirit (Rom. 8:12-13; Gal. 5:25), Christ will not condemn them.

On the contrary, Christ died for our sins, Christ was buried, and Christ rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4). "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). And now, Christ is even at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33) making intercession

for us (Rom. 8:34). “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). It is emphatically encouraging to know that there is no one, including Christ, to condemn us as God’s elect but that Christ ever lives to plead our case before His Father in heaven.

Proposition/Question Six: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ” (Rom. 8:35).

We have seen that since we are God’s elect and He has justified us, He is for us and not against us; Christ is for us and not against us and will not condemn us; the Holy Spirit is for us and not against us and dwells within us; God’s holy angels are for us and not against us and rejoice in our salvation. However, Satan is against us but no charge of his can be sustained against us. Well, could other people separate us from the love of Christ? No. Jesus once said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat. 10:28). John tells us:

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

It is exceptionally encouraging to know that no one, not God, not Christ, not the Holy Spirit, not God’s holy angels, not Satan nor his angels, and no man can separate us from the love of Christ. However, all these are external forces/factors. Now we ask a question Paul did not ask here. Can the Christian (elect of God) separate himself/herself from God so as to be lost eternally?

Christians can sin against God (1 John 1:8-10). Sin separates the sinner from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Thus, Christians (elect of God) can sin and separate themselves from God so as to be lost eternally. Yet, even then, they will not be separated from the love of God and/or Christ in the absolute sense. God continues to love His children even when they are lost (as the Father continued to love the prodigal son when he was lost; Luke 15:11-32). But they will be separated from the love of God and/or Christ in the sense that they will lose their souls in hell. Thus, we are told:

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
(Jam. 5:19-20).

May God help us to so conduct our lives that we ourselves will not do what God the Father, Christ the Son, the Holy Spirit, the holy angels, Satan and his ministers and messengers, and other people could not and cannot do: Separate us from the love of Christ.

Proposition/Question Seven: “*Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*” (Rom. 8:35).

In this seventh proposition/question there are listed seven items. If we change this from the form of a question to the form of a statement it would read: “Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword shall not separate us from the love of Christ.” These things can also work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. Tribulation worketh patience (Rom. 5:3). Tribulation (afflictions) worked in the life of Joseph to give him favor and wisdom and make him governor in Egypt so that he and his people were delivered (Acts 7:10).

In distresses we can approve ourselves as ministers of God (2 Cor. 6:4) and gain strength (2 Cor. 12:10). Persecutions, when endured, will not only increase our strength (2 Cor. 12:10) and our patience (2 The. 1:4), but also our faith, especially when the Lord delivers us from such (2 Tim. 3:11). Persecutions helped the early church to go and grow (Acts. 8:4). Famine (dearth) helped to preserve the people of Israel so the promise of God to Abraham would be fulfilled (Acts 7:11-18). It was famine that caused Elias (Elijah) to be in the right place at the right time to resurrect the widow’s son (Luke 4:25-26; 1 Kin. 17:8-24). Also it was famine that helped cause the prodigal son to come to himself and return to his father (Luke 15:11-24).

It was nakedness that could have and should have caused the church in Laodicea to buy white raiment, that it might be clothed and that the shame of its nakedness not appear (Rev. 3:14-22). The many perils of Paul, in journeyings of waters, of robbers, by his own countrymen, by the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren helped to make him more the minister of Christ than he was (2 Cor. 11:23-26). Just as a physical sword, when properly used, can make one a minister of God for good (Rom. 13:4), God’s spiritual sword, when properly used, can also make one a minister of God for good (Eph. 6:10-20; Heb. 4:12). Even when the sword is used against

God's people to lead them into captivity or to kill them with the sword, John writes, "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints" (Rev. 13:10). Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword separate us from the love of Christ? No! Even these things can work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. It is extraordinarily encouraging to know this.

A SACRED PASSAGE

"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom. 8:36). This is a quotation from Psalm 44:22 which reads, "Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." Brother Roy Deaver points out that Psalm 44 is an appeal for deliverance from defeat. In verses 1-8 "the Psalmist stresses that God is the source of *good* things" (1:146). In verses 9-16 "the Psalmist stresses that God is sometimes the source of *bad* circumstances" (1:146). Then in verses 17-22 "the Psalmist deals with the question: Why? Why have God's people been cast off? He affirms that it *was not* because Israel had been unfaithful to God" (1:146). The Psalm is concluded in verses 23 as "the Psalmist fervently prays for deliverance" (1:147). Brother Deaver continues to point out that the fundamental message of this Psalm is: "God, who sends good things into our lives, may also send bad circumstances into our lives, and this for our own good and to His glory" (1:147).

Without doubt, a key to understanding this Psalm is found in Paul's quoting (in Romans 8:36) verse 22: "Nay, for thy sake we are slain (killed) all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter." In the very pursuit of trying to accomplish God's will, God's servants are often persecuted (and even killed). But, in all these things "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us," and nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God (1:148).

Psalm 44 is an elegantly encouraging Sacred Scripture.

A SOLEMN PRONOUNCEMENT

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39).

Paul's answer to all of the previous seven propositions/questions is now given in one emphatic negative: *Nay*. He then refers to "all these things." This phrase includes the hurtings, the hope, and the help of the Holy Spirit. It includes the four laws of providence: the law of operation (all things **work**), the law of cooperation (all things work **together**), the law of compensation (all things work together **for good**), and the law of limitation (all things work together for good **to them that love God**). These four laws of providence are part of the *all things* that work for our good and God's glory. It also includes God's purpose which in turn includes God's foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. It even includes tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. Paul says, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." However, who can be and how can one be more than a conqueror? McGarvey writes:

Some see in this a peculiar kind of victory. "This is a new order of victory," says Chrysostom, "to conquer by means of our adversaries." "The adversaries," says Chillingworth, "are not only overcome and disarmed, but they are brought over to our faction; they war on our side." If such a meaning may be properly put upon this word, then the idea here is beautifully harmonious and consonant with the thought expressed in verse 28, which shows that God indeed causes things which seem to be inimical to serve our interests and further our blessedness (370-371).

Then Paul sets forth this most solemn pronouncement.

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 (Rom. 8:38-39).

These ten things are set forth in the following five groups:

1. Things of Earth (death and life)
2. Things of Heaven (angels, principalities, and powers)
3. Things of Time (things present and things to come)
4. Things of Space (height and depth)
5. Things not included in the other things (nor any other creature).

First, concerning death and life, Paul wrote to the Romans, "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's"

(Rom. 14:8). Again, Paul wrote, “For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain” (Phi. 1:21). Second, concerning angels, principalities, and powers, Paul wrote, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*” (Eph. 6:12). Paul said that if we would be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, and if we would put on the whole armor of God, that we would be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:10-11). He additionally said that if we would take unto ourselves the whole armor of God, that we would be able to withstand in the evil day (Eph. 6:13). He therefore commanded us to stand, having our loins girt about with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness, having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, taking the shield of faith, taking the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. He promised that if we will do so, that we will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked (Eph. 6:14-18).

Third, concerning things present and things to come, Paul wrote, “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” (Rom. 8:18). Fourth, concerning height and depth, we read:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. If I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me (Psa. 139:9-10).

If we are God’s elect, it is eminently encouraging to know that nothing on earth and nothing in heaven can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. No matter who we are, when we are, or where we are, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. No wonder Paul wrote, “Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3:21).

CONCLUSION

We have read and studied Paul’s seven propositions, Paul’s sacred passage, and Paul’s solemn pronouncement in Romans 8:31-39. We conclude that nothing can separate us from the love of God if (and as

long as) we love God and are the called according to His purpose! May such encourage us to ever love Him and always keep His commandments.

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THINGS NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-5:1

Bobby Liddell



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COMMENDATION

The Psalmist of old penned: “Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa. 133:1). Indeed, there is reason for rejoicing when one contemplates the unity enjoyed by those who love God and one another, and who are walking in the light together (1 John 1:7-10). Therefore, it is with great joy that we are able to come together again in this great Bellview lecture series. Only God knows how the brotherhood has been blessed and will continue to be blessed by the efforts put forth by the brethren of the Bellview church. Thus, we thank the elders who oversee this work (Acts 20:28), and praise them for their foresight and dedication. May their days be long upon the earth and may God’s richest blessings continue to be theirs. Commendation is also due the many members, past and present, who have labored together so well to promote this wonderful time of worship, Bible study, spiritual growth, and fellowship.

INTRODUCTION

The text, as quoted from the King James Version, is from 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

We all need encouragement! Therefore, we are thankful for the emphasis of this lectureship. We live in a time when never before have men had so much to enjoy in life and enjoy life so little. Possessions have possessed the majority of those in our world, and they are dragging their human prey down to hell (Mat. 7:13-14). Never, in recent remembrance, have so many cared so much about the things which are seen—but uncertain (1 Tim. 6:17; cf., Jos. 7:20-21). Few realize that what matters is not matter, not material and temporal (1 John 2:15-17; 1 Tim. 6:10; Luke 12:16-ff). That which is of real importance is that which is eternal in nature and unseen by human eye (Mat. 6:33; 16:26). While our life spans have increased, adding to the quantity of our years, our lives have decreased in quality. We need help.

We need encouragement to open our eyes to focus on that which is unseen—except by the eye of faith (cf., John 20:29; 1 Pet.1:8). “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Too many, even church members, are sad and unsatisfied, wondering: “Is there not something more to life than this?” They, regrettably, have tried to straddle the fence, and the result is they have followed the way of the world instead of the way of Christ (Mat. 6:24). Some openly wonder why the wicked seem to prosper (read Psalms 37 and 73).

Asaph wrote: “For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psa. 73:3). He was discouraged by his observation that the wicked seemed to be happy, healthy, wealthy, and undisturbed. From the outward appearance, they were living the good life. It appeared, to him, that all he had done in seeking to live righteously was in vain. He continued:

Behold, these *are* the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase *in* riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart *in* vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should

offend *against* the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it *was* too painful for me (Psa. 73:12-16).

However, he understood when he realized the *end* of such a wicked life is destruction. The world could not see this, and, for a time, Asaph did not either, for he was blinded to the reality of the unseen. However, he was encouraged when he went into the sanctuary of God and began to see things as they really are.

Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works (Psa. 73:17-28).

God's people should learn the lesson learned by Asaph. We should receive great encouragement from the text under consideration (2 Cor. 4:16-5:1), originally written by the inspired apostle, Paul who is called "The Apostle of Faith," to the brethren who were the church at Corinth (2 Cor. 1:1). Why? Because in it God's children are told we are not to faint (4:16), not to fear (v. 17), and not to focus on the temporal things of life (v. 18). Instead, we are to rejoice in the renewal that is inward (v. 16), the reward that is eternal (v. 17), and the revelation of that which is not seen.

IF WE LOOK ON THINGS NOT SEEN, WE WILL NOT FAINT

"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). God's people do not faint; that is, we do not grow weary and give up "though our outward man perish." The outer man, the physical man, that part of man which is seen, is subject to death and decay, and will go back to the earth from whence it came. The wise man wrote, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God

who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7). Death is an appointment we all shall keep (Heb. 9:27), unless we are living when Christ returns (1 The. 4:17). Death should not frighten us. We know it is coming, and for the faithful in Christ, death is but a doorway to a life of eternal happiness (Phi. 1:21; Rev. 14:13). As one said, “If we live long enough, we are going to die.”

Even before death, we observe the process of aging and the slow but sure deterioration of our physical bodies. Yet, Christians do not give up because we realize we are aging, weakening, and deteriorating—physically. Even in the face of death, we dare not faint. Or, just as frightening, in the face of life when the going gets rough, the way seems dark, and it looks as though everyone is against us, we do not give up. Why not?

For one thing, we have the avenue of prayer which is the earnest approach of the inward man to the unseen throne of the unseen God. Note what Christ taught: “And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). To paraphrase what Christ said, “Do not give up. Pray!” The world charges prayer is the pitiable cry of the feeble and weak. They cannot see God; thus, they do not believe in Him, nor that He can and will answer prayer. To the ungodly and unbelieving, prayer is a futile and vain expression heard by no one. Though it is true we have not seen the eternal God to whom we pray, we know: “the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers” (1 Pet. 3:12). The Christian knows there is a God in heaven (Dan. 2:28), whose love and mercy are extended to the faithful. Therefore, one in Christ (Gal. 3:26-29), can ask and expect to receive (Mat. 7:7; Jam. 4:2), when he asks according to the will of God. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14).

Other reasons, we *faint not* are: we have the blessing of God’s mercy (2 Cor. 4:1); we know we shall reap, in due season (Gal. 6:9); we look to the perfect example of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21), and are encouraged because He “endured such contradiction of sinners against himself” (Heb. 12:3); we remember that even when God chastens us, it is as a loving father chastening his son (Heb. 12:5); and we have the example of the church at Ephesus, described by Christ in this way.

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted (Rev. 2:2-3).

What shall the Christian do when, though doing good, he faces troubles and persecutions, is tried, endures suffering, and is reproached for the name of Christ (1 Pet. 4:12-14), and someone mocks: "Where is your God?" If he thinks of the outward man, if his eyes are on the things which are temporal (temporary), he will faint. However, if he thinks of the inward man who is growing stronger every day as he follows Christ, and is preparing himself for heaven—that is, if he looks to that which is not seen—he can continue, patiently enduring, even rejoicing. He can understand what Peter meant: "Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:16).

IF WE LOOK ON THINGS NOT SEEN, WE WILL NOT FEAR

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). Before we go any further, note these two things: (1) our affliction is light, and (2) our affliction is limited. Men fear that which *afflicts* them. Fear exaggerates that which we perceive to be a threat to us. While teaching a class of preachers about fear, I told them of the very first door upon which I knocked to inquire if the inhabitants would be interested in a Bible study. I was in unknown territory, and I was afraid because I did not know how I would be received, and there was the real possibility of my making a mistake in my approach and follow-up. The homeowner opened the door, and on either side of him were two huge dogs, which, though standing on all four feet, were still about four feet tall. After finishing my story and explaining how fear causes us to imagine the worst and exaggerate the possible problems, one of the students said, "Well, you know those dogs might have been chihuahuas, and you just thought they were huge!"

Fear magnifies *afflictions*, cripples the church, and keeps brethren from even trying to do what God has commanded (cf., Mark 16:15-16). Many have approached me, in my work as Dean of Admissions for the Memphis School of Preaching, and have expressed their desire to

preach, only ultimately to give up their desire because of fear. They fear leaving home, family, and a steady job for a life of dependence upon brethren for support, and of an *uncertain future* as they perceive it to be. My answer has been and will be: “If you will commit yourself to do God’s will, He will bless you.” We need to remember what John, “The Apostle of Love,” wrote: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

Paul wrote of “our light afflictions.” How heavy they seem to be, especially when we are called upon to carry them. We would like to sing, “Nobody knows the troubles I seen. Nobody knows my trials.” God knows and, through Paul, says they are light and momentary. Yet, we want to exaggerate them. We look at them and they get bigger and worse, and the more we look at them, the less we focus on the things which are unseen. Let us be encouraged to look on things not seen, and we will not fear.

IF WE LOOK ON THINGS NOT SEEN, WE WILL NOT FOCUS ON THE TEMPORAL THINGS OF LIFE

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). It is not easy to keep our eyes off the things which are seen. Notice what Paul had written in the preceding verses.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:8-15).

If Paul looked at life from the viewpoint of the temporal, he could well have said, “Life stinks!” However, he had the proper perspective, understanding that which is the here and now does not last.

After a tornado had devastated his upscale neighborhood, blowing his house into a million pieces, and scattering them over the countryside for miles, a man stood disconsolate and weeping. His world had come to a crashing end. He thought of how he had lost everything. All the things for which he had worked all his life were gone. The antiques he had collected were splinters. The paintings which he had loved so were shreds hanging from the tops of bare twisted trees. His classic cars were destroyed, mashed into a pile of bent rubble. The relentless thought which haunted the hollow pit of his empty soul was: "I have lost everything!" Then, he realized there by his side were his wife and two children. They were what really mattered after all. For the first time in his life, he realized there was something more important than things.

There is a finality to the temporal, for it is always and only temporary. Ultimately, everything which can be seen today, with the human eye, will be gone. With it will be gone the troubles which face the child of God (Rev. 21:4). Not a single thing of this old temporal world will remain. The houses in which we live will be gone. So, too, the cars we drive, clothes we wear, food we eat, riches we lay up on earth (Mat. 6:19-21), bodies we inhabit (1 Cor. 15:50-58; 2 Cor. 5:1-10), and even the earth upon which we live. Peter, called "The Apostle of Hope," wrote by inspiration:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness (2 Pet. 3:9-11).

All these things shall be dissolved. What will be important then? Let us be encouraged and keep our focus on what is truly important. Like Peter, if we take our eyes off Jesus and look at the world round about us, we will sink (Mat. 14:30). Let us then "set [our] affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2). Let us look by faith to those things not seen (Heb. 11:1). We know the worldly man does not want to hear the Truth about temporal things, but it is still the truth. Christians do not look at the seen but uncertain; that is, the things of this material world are not that upon which we fix our gaze. We

know there is much more to life. Therefore, we look at the unseen but certain.

IF WE LOOK ON THINGS NOT SEEN, WE WILL BE ENCOURAGED BY A RENEWAL THAT IS INWARD

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). What man has seen the spirit which inhabits the human body while it lives? No one. We know it is there for James wrote: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jam. 2:26). The spirit animates the body; thus, we can see the results of its presence when we see life in a human being—but we cannot see the inward man now.

The inward man is the spirit of man (Dan. 7:15). God is the father of spirits (Heb. 12:9). Thus, we are His offspring (Acts 17:29), created in God’s image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). This means our spirits come from God, and at death, our spirits return to “God who gave it.” The body goes back to the dust, there to await the resurrection call, but the spirit lives on (cf., Luke 16:19-31). Again, as the wise man penned: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7).

Paul’s inspired pronouncement is that the inward man is renewed day by day even though the outward man perishes. As the years go by, we look in our mirrors to see our faces becoming wrinkled, our hair turning gray (or turning loose), and our physical bodies becoming weaker and feebler, drawing ever closer to the graves where they will sleep awaiting the call of our Lord to come forth. How encouraging to know that the inward man is getting stronger as we live faithfully, listening to God’s will, and applying it to our lives. We are becoming more robust spiritually. Our spiritual muscles are getting bigger and our spiritual health is growing.

How important it is for us to realize that at the end of our physical lives, when our bodies give up, our spirits must not give up (faint). Having walked with God all along the way, we have reached the greatest strength of our inward man (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5). The inner man is not ready to die, as does the body, for a lifetime of preparation has made him ready to live eternally. Friend, this is what Christians do. Christians live in hope that reaches beyond death. Paul wrote that he lived “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised

before the world began” (Tit. 1:2). This author has known many who have done so, and trust that the reader has as well. Let us be encouraged to be among that happy number.

No, we cannot see this inward renewal as it takes place, but, certainly, its effects are shown by the words said and deeds done while in this mortal frame. As Jesus said, the inner man determines what comes out of man: “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat. 12:34). The writer of Proverbs gave this inspired account of the inner man’s direction of the outer man: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he” (Pro. 23:7). A stern warning sounds forth from 2 Corinthians 5:10: “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.” What a blessing to know our inward man can be renewed and live in Christ now and with Christ eternally!

IF WE LOOK ON THINGS NOT SEEN, WE WILL BE ENCOURAGED BY A REWARD THAT IS ETERNAL

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). While multiplied millions seek to gain the things which will not last (Mat. 6:19-21), to hoard the riches they gain, and to look greedily upon that which they have acquired; the Christian understands the reward to be sought is one that is eternal. Peter wrote of this eternal reward as that which is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

It is not a temporal prize for which we labor. Paul said:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

That which we must seek, and upon which we must fix our eyes, is that which has real weight to it. It is not light and momentary, like our affliction. However, the affliction we face equips us for (“worketh for us”) a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” The blessings of living for Christ so far exceed the affliction we bear and outweigh them to such a degree that there is really no comparison. Should not this cause us to rejoice? What is a “vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (Jam. 4:14), as compared to “life eternal” (Mat. 25:46)? If we were called upon every hour of every day of our lives to suffer for the cause of Christ, would eternity with God in Heaven be worth it? As the song goes: “Heaven will surely be worth it all.”

Please consider carefully the following statements of Paul which show the terrible things he was called upon to bear in his service to our Lord and Savior.

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours 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 (2 Cor. 11:23-27).

Now, should we think Paul considered this too much to bear? No, he looked beyond this to a reward reserved in Heaven, to a crown of life which would be his. In closing the epistle, he manifested his attitude as he admonished his brethren: “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11). God was with Paul, and He will be with us as long as we look at the things not seen and are encouraged by a reward that is eternal.

**IF WE LOOK ON THINGS NOT SEEN,
WE WILL BE ENCOURAGED BY A FUTURE
REVELATION OF THE UNSEEN AND ETERNAL**

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). The Hebrews

writer penned: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). While upon this earth, our minds labor to understand the eternal and unseen. We look to God’s Word and read as He has revealed to us, in ways our finite minds can comprehend, just a glimpse into that realm beyond time. Our hearts meditate upon these thoughts, seeking to grasp that which is forever beyond our grasp in this mortal sphere. Yet, we long to see, to know, and to understand. After all our efforts, we still must look to a future revelation of the unseen. In spite of our desires going unfulfilled while we walk upon the earth, we are encouraged in the knowledge that those things not seen will one day be seen—if we continue faithfully in obedient service to God (Mat. 25:34).

Think of all that which we have not seen, but by the eye of faith, and which we will see when we cross over from time to eternity. The faithful will see Heaven in all its beauty and wonder. “Won’t it be wonderful there?” Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the eternal Word from before the beginning, our loving Savior, will be there, and we may be in His holy presence for eternity. The Holy Spirit, eternal member of the Godhead (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9), about whom so many have wondered will be in that heavenly home. God, the Father will welcome us as our loving Father gathering home His children, and never more will we be separated from Him. The eternal throne of God, figuratively portrayed in Scripture (cf., Eze. 1 and 10) is there. The heavenly host, into whose work our investigations have brought limited knowledge, and numbered by Daniel in the hundred millions (Dan. 7:10), will be in that beautiful eternal home. There will be the tree of life and the pure water of the river of life, and there will be no graves on the hillsides of Heaven (Rev. 22:1-2; 21:4). All the faithful of all the ages will be there, and no sin will enter therein (Rev. 21:27).

CONCLUSION

Is there any doubt about the reality of these things not seen? No, not for the Christian. What an encouragement to us! Paul wrote, “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor. 5:1). *We know*. How? By faith, as God has revealed the existence of these things to us. *We have* a promise just as sure as God is, and we know God will not break His promise (Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2).

Keep in mind, these things not seen are reserved for those who do not faint, do not fear, and do not focus on the temporal things of life, but who look to a renewal of the inward man, a reward that is eternal, and a revelation of these things in Heaven one day.

Let us be encouraged to live in view of eternity, to look toward eternity, and to keep our eyes focused on those things not seen.

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; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“ALL THINGS ARE BECOME NEW” 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

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This writer is eternally indebted to the Bellview Church of Christ. Without its generosity with the gospel he would not be a Christian, and without its encouragement of young men he would not be a preacher. May God continue to bless the sound elders, faithful preacher, and wonderful members of this good church.

INTRODUCTION

The young man felt out of place as he walked into the church building. He was used to the world and conforming to *its* ways. He was familiar with unseasoned speech and lax morality; the sound of God’s Word was foreign to his ears, and the uprightness it demanded was opposite to his ways. In spite of a sin-stained soul and a world-filled mind, righteousness appealed to the young man, and his journey began.

As time passed and sermons were preached, the young man painfully realized that he was outside of Christ, absent of hope, and without God in the world. With every sin that was condemned and with every virtue that was upheld by the proclaimed gospel, the transgressions which marred the man’s heart became more apparent. His sins separated him from God, blackened his soul, and choked the life from his spirit.

But the same message that revealed his soul-decaying plight to him also provided a cure for his horrible condition. The sins of his youth

and the transgressions of his ignorance could be blotted out. The crimes that he had committed against God could be erased from his record, and the dying spirit within him could be revived and even reborn. Though in sin and defiled by mistakes, the opportunity to start life over free from guilt and filled with hope was possible.

With a new purpose in heart and a new direction in mind, the young man stepped out into the aisle, grabbed the hand of the preacher, and prepared himself for a new life. Within minutes he was plunged beneath the waters of baptism and rose to walk in newness of life. His sins were washed away, his spirit was resurrected, and he was never the same again!

The preceding story has been told time and time again. It is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, repeated in the books of church history, and remembered in the hearts of the converted. In addition, this story is found within the inspiring words of 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Consider the voluminous chapters of encouragement found within this relatively short collection of words.

AN ENCOURAGING PRIVILEGE

The story of 2 Corinthians 5:17 begins with an open opportunity to all mankind: “Therefore if any man.” Though few in words, this short phrase has the ability to prepare all living souls for eternity.

The Universal Call

The words under consideration are reminiscent of the Master’s invitation to the masses as recorded in John 7:37. Jesus implored, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” In a similar fashion, the Christ invited humanity to Him with the gracious words of Matthew 11:28-30:

Come unto me, all *ye* that labour 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.

Repeated throughout the New Testament is this fact 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). Paul proclaimed this truth when he penned: “For this *is* good and acceptable in

the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Consider also the words of 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Indeed, the Lord “is rich unto all that call upon him” (Rom. 10:12).

The Unique Circumstances

This universal call is clearly demonstrated by the unusual situation at Corinth. By today’s standards, the Corinthian congregation was made up of the filth of the world. In fact, they were viewed in the same way by many of their own peers. While many modern American churches are made up of society’s elite—affluent business owners and prestigious families of the community—some at Corinth were former fornicators, adulterers, sodomites, thieves, and drunkards. They had been steeped in worldly darkness, saturated with sinful indulgence, and separated from the holy God of heaven. But alas, the call to leave the kingdom of corruption for the realm of righteousness came even to them. By the proclamation of the gospel, the Corinthians came to understand their terrible plight and were instructed on how to escape their hopeless condition. They learned that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. As well as anyone, they witnessed the universal invitation of God and were privileged with the opportunity to begin anew.

In connection with the Corinthian’s circumstances, it is significant to note that not only were the recipients of the Corinthian letters previous sinners of the highest order, so was the writer of the epistles. Realizing the merciful nature of the gospel’s universal calling, Paul wrote the following:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (1 Tim. 1:12-16).

No doubt, the conversions of the Corinthians and Paul demonstrate that the gospel is for all!

The Unmistakable Charges

The patterns set forth by the writer and recipients of the Corinthian epistles put forth some very clear responsibilities. First, the Christian must not be prejudiced in preaching the Word. Too often, Christians take it upon themselves to judge others unworthy of the gospel. Sometimes the most unlikely of individuals—those with low stations in life and those with loose codes of ethics—turn out to be the most open to truth. Those in Corinth might have been passed by and brushed off by twenty-first century saints. Those guilty of such prejudice obviously have a lack of confidence in humanity and a lack of faith in the power of God's Word (Rom. 1:16).

The second charge demonstrated by the preceding patterns is that the sinner must not view his crimes as too terrible to accept the invitation of the Christ. While many believe that once a person is saved he can never be lost, some believe that once they are lost they can never be saved. These feel that their own actions were so depraved that God could never bring Himself to forgive them. While such a view is mingled with humility, it is dominated by a lack of faith in the power of Christ's blood. May it be clearly understood and whole-heartedly believed that the cleansing agent shed forth on the cross was strong enough to remit the sins of Jesus' murderers (Acts 2:41), wash away the sins of a persecutor of God's people (Acts 22:16), and cleanse the sins of worldly degenerates (1 Cor. 6:11). Second Corinthians 5:17 most definitely pictures an encouraging privilege.

AN ENCOURAGING POSITION

The hope-filled story of 2 Corinthians 5:17 continues by detailing the location of the new life: "Therefore if any man be in Christ." The position under consideration is pictured as a place of refuge.

The Region of Doom

One would do well to consider again the former spiritual state of Paul's reading audience. The words of Ephesians 2:11-12 could be appropriately applied to the Corinthians:

Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

The former conditions of the Ephesians and Corinthians is the desperate plight of all persons outside Christ. Every soul that resides outside the Messiah gropes in darkness and draws closer to his doom with every passing moment. Upon realizing his despairing condition and being instructed on how to escape, the wise person carefully and quickly flees the world for the shelter and safety of the Savior.

The Realm of Delight

The soul that hastens to the protection of Christ finds himself in a position of great honor and multiplied blessings. To be “in Christ” is to be in an intimate relationship with Deity with the opportunity to receive all that is good and necessary for spiritual completeness (Col. 2:10). Jesus said, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). With these words, the Savior indicated that he is the source and supplier of true spiritual prosperity. Paul further emphasized this fact by declaring that Christians are blessed with “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). These multiplied blessings include redemption (Rom. 3:24), sanctification (1 Cor. 1:2), hope (1 Cor. 15:19), victory (2 Cor. 2:14), liberty (Gal. 2:4), equality (Gal. 3:28; 6:15), reconciliation (Eph. 2:13), perfection (Col. 1:28; 2:10), grace (2 Tim. 2:1), and salvation (2 Tim. 2:10), to name just a few.

It is of utmost importance to stress that, according to Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27, baptism is the door leading into this spiritual store place of prosperity and redeeming reserve of refuge. When one believes on the Christ, repents of sin, and confesses his faith in Jesus, he can be plunged beneath the waters of baptism where he contacts the blood of Christ and secures the encouraging position under consideration (John 8:24; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 22:16).

AN ENCOURAGING PICTURE

The story of 2 Corinthians 5:17 proceeds with a hope-filled description of the person who is in Christ: “He is a new creature.” This encouraging view of the Christian, the new *creation*, is pictured in numerous ways by the Scriptures. Consider a few of these refreshing pictures.

A Picture of Renewal

As Springtime often refreshes the human spirit by its beautiful scenes of new life and pure beginnings, so conversion to Christ

enlivens the immortal soul with its numerous provisions of positive changes. Paul sought to impress upon the Colossians that they were no longer to be dedicated to the temporal things of this world or the soul-condemning works of the flesh, but rather they were to "put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10). Related to this Colossians' passage is a fault mentioned by Peter of which many Christians are guilty. Peter said that the one who lacks the *Christian graces* is "is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Pet. 1:9). There is a danger in becoming so engrossed in the things of this life that the child of God can no longer see eternity or the need to stay prepared for it. No wonder Paul reminded disciples: "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, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2). It is vital, then, for the Christian to be transformed by the *renewing* of his mind (Rom. 12:2). Recalling his conversion and focusing on heaven enables God's child to be often refreshed with this picture of renewal.

A Picture of Resurrection

When one obeys the gospel of Jesus Christ, he is quickened from spiritual death which was caused by his trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Colossians 2:12-13 describes this quickening with the following words:

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

The responsibilities that come along with this resurrection are compressed into Paul's statement to the Romans:

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 (Rom. 6:3-4).

The new life with its new walk is, no doubt, one that focuses on heavenly priorities (Col. 3:1-2). Such a picture is truly encouraging!

A Picture of Reformation

The new creature is one who changes, or reforms, his character, condition, and concerns. Noting the change in character, consider New Testament converts such as Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-31), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:23-34), and the Corinthians (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Prior to their becoming new creatures, these were involved in sins ranging from witchcraft to persecuting God's people, from injustice to outrageous immorality. When they obeyed Christ, however, they radically reformed their characters, becoming followers of the faithful instead of servants of sin. In doing this, they also changed their conditions. As servants of sin they were condemned, hopeless, and on their way to a devil's hell. But when they rose to walk in newness of life, their souls were cleansed, their minds were transformed, and heaven was in their reach. With such great changes in characters and conditions, those New Testament examples changed their concerns also. The objects of their desires changed from earthly matters to heavenly, from temporal concerns to eternal, and from fleshly appetites to spiritual (Acts 8:24; 9:20; 16:34). When one meditates on the dramatic changes in the converted, he cannot help but to see in 2 Corinthians 5:17 an encouraging picture of reformation.

A Picture of Regeneration

Jesus told Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This new birth, or regeneration, takes place when one obeys the Spirit's inspired Word and is baptized in water for the remission of his sins (John 3:5). This, no doubt, is what Paul had in mind when he wrote of "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:5), and Peter further confirmed this fact when he said that one is born again "by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23). Like the pictures of renewal, resurrection, and reformation, this picture of regeneration emboldens the child of God and prompts him to greater service and dedication.

AN ENCOURAGING POSSIBILITY

The story unfolded in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17 comes to an inspiring conclusion by detailing an opportunity afforded only to the person who is in Christ: "Old things are passed away; behold, all things

are become new." Presented in these encouraging final words is the God-given gift of a second chance.

The Appeal of Starting Over

The masses of humanity long for opportunities to begin anew. Husbands and wives who ruined their marriages, parents and children who neglected one another, addicts who destroyed their bodies and minds, and criminals who threw away their freedom are just a few examples of people who recognize the attraction of erasing past sins and taking advantage of fresh beginnings.

Of course, it should be noted that one does not have to be an adulterer or an addict to appreciate the opportunity under consideration. Concerning their former stations in life, many say how they would like the chance to be better spouses, parents, children, employees, etc.—not that they miserably failed at such before, or grievously sinned while in those positions, but that they would simply enjoy the opportunity to better fulfill those previous roles. While the possibility of 2 Corinthians 5:17 does not allow one to by-pass all the earthly consequences of his past mistakes (e.g., criminals must pay for their crimes, damaged bodies cannot be restored to complete soundness, wayward children may refuse to be reclaimed, etc.), the opportunity to have one's former record cleared in heaven and be given future opportunities on earth to do better is certainly encouraging, and thus appealing, to the tender-hearted and conscientious person.

The Areas of New Beginnings

When a person takes advantage of the opportunity to start his spiritual life over, all kinds of possibilities are at his disposal and inherent with the new life he has chosen. For example, and as already mentioned, there is a new birth (John 3:1-8). Truly, there is no better way to describe this gift of a second chance. Just as the newborn child possesses a purity and innocence, so the new babe in Christ begins his spiritual journey with a clean soul and a clear conscience. Also, there is a new manner of development with the person who starts over in Christ. Where he once fed his mind with the philosophies of men, ideas of the world, and opinions of the majority, the new man feasts on and grows by the Word of God. Peter commanded, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). In addition, the Christian, as one who put away the old man, lives

a new life. When he was raised from the watery grave of baptism, he began walking in the steps of the Savior—denying self and living for God (Rom. 6:4; Mat. 16:24). The Christian is, no doubt, a changed person. Finally, among other things, the person who begins anew in Jesus possesses a new purpose. He no longer dedicates his all to mere temporal goals and ambitions. Along with Paul he proclaims with his whole being:

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phi. 3:13-14).

Those who take advantage of the encouraging possibility of 2 Corinthians 5:17 have their eyes firmly fixed on the reward of the righteous.

While divine justice demands that man be punished for his sins, God's wonderful grace affords the trespasser the opportunity in this life to start over, wiping away his soul-damning debt (Rom. 6:23). Men may search, but a greater source of true encouragement cannot be found!

CONCLUSION

The records of church history and the hearts of the faithful are filled with stories of conversions. Numerous are the accounts of individuals who, upon realizing their desperate plight and hopeless condition, accepted the universal call of the gospel and put to death the old person who was dedicated to self and sin. These stories tell of men and women who forsook the world and followed the Christ, becoming new creatures, with new purposes in life and new aims in heart. Their lives were renewed, their hopes were restored, and their spirits were reborn. These inspiring accounts precisely follow the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17, a story of privilege which beautifully pictures an honorable and heavenly position of encouraging possibility.

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS”

EPHESIANS 1:3

John West



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INTRODUCTION

The book of Ephesians contains some of the most profound doctrinal teaching, as well as the most practical instructions for Christians, as anywhere in all of the New Testament. The text of Ephesians 1:3 is no exception: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ.”

Paul teaches us that as Christians we have all spiritual blessings in Christ. Throughout this book he mentions these blessing and tells us how to receive and keep them. In this chapter, we will discuss “all spiritual blessings” and notice many of these blessings mentioned in chapter one. We will also notice where they are found and when we can access them.

ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Paul tells the Ephesians that they have been blessed with “all spiritual blessings.” These blessings are not from just anyone, but from God. James writes that it is God who gives these good gifts (Jam. 1:17). Under the Old Law, God’s blessings were often material blessings such as “Fruitful wombs, flourishing crops, abundant flocks, bread in every basket, prosperity and world influence (Deu. 28:1-4)” (Hughes, 19). Even in the New Testament Jesus promises to take care

of His own (Mat. 6:25-34), but the focus is primarily on the spiritual rather than the material, on the soul rather than the body (Hughes, 19).

The things of this world one day will be gone, but the spiritual blessings we enjoy in Christ will continue throughout eternity. These blessings are listed in verses four through fourteen and include such things as: “His choice (from the foundation of the world) to bring the saved to holiness, pureness, love, adoption, redemption, grace, Christ, obedience to the gospel, the Holy Spirit and an inheritance” (Bristow, 2). Notice now each of the blessings we can enjoy in Christ.

1. Holiness (v. 4). God has called His children to holiness and godliness. Peter recorded, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16; cf., Rom. 12:1-2; Tit. 2:12). Since God is holy, He is calling us to attain this high attitude in our lives.

2. Purity (without blemish, v. 4). In Jesus’ sermon on the mount, He teaches, “Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Mat. 5:8). Purity is a virtue that is lacking in our society today. More than ever Christians need to set the example of purity in this impure world.

3. Love (v. 4). The Greek word *agape* is used here to express the highest form of love. Christians are to show love toward one another and show the world that we are Christ’s disciples (John 13:34-35). Jesus teaches that if we have this love, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). John later states that these commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3). Paul writes, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). In the first letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity” (1 Cor. 13:13). He later states, “Let all your things be done with charity” (1 Cor. 16:14). In a society where there is little love or a perverted form of love, Christians should demonstrate proper, biblical love.

4. Adoption (v. 5). This was taken from a Roman custom since the Jews had no legal provision for the transfer of a child from one family to another (Ayers, 57-58). A Roman citizen could receive a child into his family and give the child his name, but it was only done by a legal act with witnesses. When this occurred, the child had the same rights and privileges as one born into the family (Lipscomb and Shepherd, 19). The adoption of which Paul speaks is a spiritual adoption that

gives full rights and privileges to those who obey the gospel and become part of God's family.

The Adoption comes "through (Greek *dia*) Jesus Christ" that is, His sacrificial death has provided the means of our adoption, and when we believe and obey His Gospel, the adoption is accomplished. All of this is "according to the good pleasure of his will." It was God's desire to establish the church, which consists of a group of people who love and serve Him willingly (Ayers, 58).

5. Redemption (v. 7). Redemption is a wonderful blessing bestowed upon us when we obey the gospel of Christ. It literally means "a releasing for (i.e., on payment of) a ransom" (Vine, 264). We have been released from sin and the ransom paid by the precious blood of Christ (1 Cor. 6:20). Peter writes:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Jesus came and shed His blood that we might have the forgiveness of sins, as stated by Paul in verse seven (cf., Mat. 26:28). Jesus also shed His blood to purchase the church (Acts 20:28). Had His blood not been shed, we would not have redemption, and there would be no church of which we can be members (Heb. 9:12-22). The stain of sin can only be removed by the blood of Christ, and the spiritual blessings we receive flow down to us from that stream (Henry, 6:688). In Deuteronomy 12:23, we read that "blood *is* the life," and in the New Testament we read that Jesus came that we might have life (John 10:10). This is all done "according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7).

6. Grace (v. 7). If it were not for God's grace bestowed upon us in His sending Christ to die upon the cross, we would not enjoy any of these spiritual blessings. In Ephesians 2:5, Paul says that God: "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." This passage does not state that we are saved by grace alone as some erroneously contend. However, God's grace does save us when coupled with faith (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:16). This grace has been called "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24) and the "word of his grace" (Acts 20:32). What we know about God's grace, we know through His Word. Some teach today that the way we know of God's grace is through the direct operation of the Spirit, but these false teachers cannot produce one Scripture to support this false

doctrine. The Bible teaches that God's grace, which comes through Christ, is a teaching grace (Tit. 2:11-12), not a mystical grace through some special, divine touch of the Spirit. Paul, in writing to the Romans said, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). This grace that justifies is through redemption in Christ and comes to man through the truth (Col. 1:6). Through knowing and obeying the truth of grace, men can have hope and stand in favor with God (Rom. 5:1-2).

7. Obedience to the gospel (v. 13). The Ephesians heard the truth of the gospel and obeyed. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). When the Ephesians learned the truth and were made free by the blood of Jesus, they began enjoying these blessings. For one to be in Christ today, he must also obey the gospel of Christ. Paul states, "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" (Rom. 1:16). The gospel was offered to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles as is indicated in Ephesians 1:12-13. Paul makes the contrast between *we* (v. 12) and *ye* (v. 13), indicating that it was first given to the Jews and now to the Gentiles. A person obeys the gospel when he hears God's Word (Rom. 10:17), believes (John 8:24), repents (Acts 2:38), confesses (Rom. 10:10), and is baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27).

8. The Holy Spirit (v. 13). Another spiritual blessing enjoyed by the Ephesians, and subsequently by us, is the seal of the Holy Spirit of promise.

The Seal of which Paul wrote was placed on letters, contracts, or other important documents. Usually the seal was of wax, which was placed on the document and impressed with a signet ring. The seal identified the document with the owner and authority of the signet ring. Thus, being "sealed with the Holy Spirit" simply means that when people become Christians the Spirit identifies them as belonging to or being under the authority of the One the seal represents, which is, of course, God (Burgett, 70).

This spiritual seal identifies those who are God's children. The Ephesians received this seal and the miraculous gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of Paul's hands (Acts 19:1-7). Unlike the Ephesians, "we do not; but we receive it in our hearts, by receiving the word of God into our hearts and bring them into subjection to it" (Lipscomb and Shepherd, 27). We bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) today by

obeying God's Word. The Calvinists try to inject the direct operation of the Spirit in this passage to fit their perverted doctrine. They believe the Spirit seals us and then guides us into all truth, separate and apart from or in conjunction with the Word of God. If the Spirit operates apart from or in conjunction with the Word of God, then why follow God's Word? The Spirit can lead us to do what we need to without studying the Scriptures. If the Holy Spirit operates directly on the heart, then why are there countries where there are no Christians? The Holy Spirit could just as easily open their hearts and save them without the Word, if that doctrine was true. Why carry out the great commission if the Spirit operates directly upon the heart. If the Holy Spirit operates directly today, then why be judged by the Word in the last day (John 12:48)? The Holy Spirit could direct our lives without the aid of the Bible. A direct operation takes away the personal responsibility and accountability of man. It also contradicts several plain passages of the Bible which teach that one is saved by the gospel (Rom. 1:16; John 6:44-45; 1 Cor. 1:21). A direct operation makes God a respecter of persons, yet the Bible teaches just the opposite (Acts 10:34-35). No one in the New Testament ever prayed for a direct operation of the Spirit to save them or even to keep them saved. The Bible teaches we are sanctified through God's Word, not a "touch of the Spirit" (John 17:17). The Word of God is a living and active word which is able to save men's soul (Heb. 4:12). The Word of God is also sufficient to keep us saved without divine help from the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). It gives more than simple *information* to us today because it is a living and powerful guide that "furnishes us unto every good work."

9. Inheritance (vv. 11, 14). The final spiritual blessing listed in this section of Scripture is an inheritance that we will enjoy one day. Paul, in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, writes, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). He mentions this inheritance as being "among all them which are sanctified." Jesus, in His prayer, said that we are sanctified through truth (John 17:17). Christ promises a "crown of life" if we remain faithful to Him and His truth (Rev. 2:10).

Our inheritance will not be on this earth, as the Jehovah's Witnesses teach, but will be in heaven. Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:4: "To an inher-

itance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” This inheritance mentioned by Peter is described in four ways: (1) It is incorruptible (immortal, imperishable, enduring). The inheritance which God gives is not affected by the elements of time. It is unlike all earthly inheritance, which after time begins to decay (Woods, 26). Our inheritance in heaven, however, is one that we will enjoy eternally. (2) It is undefiled (pure, chaste, and unsoiled). It is not contaminated by the pollutants of this world of sin, for nothing shall enter in to defile it or make it unclean (Rev. 21:27) (Woods, 26). (3) It is further described as one “that fadeth not away” (will not wither). Things of this earth will wither, but our reward in heaven will not deteriorate. (4) Finally it is described as being “reserved in heaven for you” (not on this earth). The Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that all the saved, except the one hundred forty four thousand, will be on the earth eternally. Peter, an inspired man, states that this inheritance is reserved for us in heaven: not earth. The Bible, in other passages, teaches that this inheritance will be in heaven. Notice the words of Jesus in the sermon on the mount: “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Mat. 5:12). Paul writes, “our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phi. 3:20—ASV). Furthermore, Peter teaches that the earth is going to be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10-11). Why would someone desire a place that will one day be destroyed? Why would someone desire a place where there is sin, sorrow, sickness, and death? The Christian does not desire the earth because we have a home in heaven awaiting us. Jesus has prepared an inheritance for us in heaven, and by serving Him faithfully, He will reward us with it in eternity (John 14:1-3).

IN HEAVENLY PLACES

These blessings are spiritual because they are in heavenly places. Christ is in the heavenly place ruling by the right hand of God in His kingdom (1 Pet. 1:20). We must be in His kingdom to enjoy these spiritual blessings. Many today look at the church/kingdom as of secondary importance and the person of Christ of greatest importance. But the Bible teaches that to be in Christ is to be in His body—the church (Eph. 1:20-23). There is no way to separate Christ from His church. Notice Colossians 1:13: “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son.”

Paul states a few verses later, "And he is the head of the body, the church" (v. 18). When we are in His body, we enjoy fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). The only way to enjoy true fellowship with one another is to be in His body. "The idea of fellowship is the prominent thought; every spiritual blessing we have received, the heavenly places in which they are received, are ours only through fellowship with Christ" (Lipscomb and Shepherd, 17). There can be **no** true fellowship outside of the body of Christ.

One day, Christ will deliver His Kingdom back to the father (1 Cor. 15:24). Therefore, the desire of the Christian should be to reach "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phi. 3:14). This is done because our house is in heaven, not earth (2 Cor. 5:1). We realize that we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth, and we seek for a heavenly country (Heb. 11:13, 16) where we have our hope (Col. 1:5).

IN CHRIST

It is interesting to note the number of times "in Christ" or one of its equivalents is found in Ephesians. "In Christ" is found ten times, "in Him" is found two times, Paul uses "in Christ Jesus" five times, "in whom," referring to Christ is used seven times, "in Himself" is found two times, and "in the Lord" is found seven times. The sum of all our spiritual blessings are found in Christ. Outside of Christ there are no spiritual blessings. Paul wants the Ephesians to understand **what** they enjoy (spiritual blessings) and **how** they enjoy them (in Christ). No wonder we find this phrase or an equivalent over 30 times in only one hundred fifty-five verses. For God to bless us spiritually, we must first be in Christ. To start enjoying these blessings, a person must: (1) have faith in Christ (John 1:12; Mark 16:16); (2) repent of sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30); (3) confess faith in Jesus (Acts 8:37); (4) be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27); and then, (5) remain faithful to Christ (Rev. 2:10). It is then and only then that God truly blesses us in Christ.

In Christ, we enjoy the wonderful blessing of fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). Paul writes of this fellowship in 1 Corinthians 1:9, "God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul teaches us that we have been called into this fellowship by *sanctification* in Christ (v. 2) and have a bond with those of like precious faith. But fellowship can **only** be extended to those who are sanctified in Christ. Paul condemns fel-

lowship with error when he writes that we are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). Those outside of Christ are in darkness and cannot be fellowshiped, but must be rebuked. As Christians, God “delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). When can those who are in the light, walk with (i.e., fellowship) those in darkness? **Never**, according to Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17! Liberals today, however, will fellowship anyone who claims to believe in Jesus. They ridicule those of us who do not follow their pernicious ways, as being *mean-spirited* and *Pharisaical*. They continue to violate God’s Word under the ruse of *love*, but have no idea about the meaning of true love. These people are of their father—the devil—and will spend eternity with him if they do not repent. Those, however, who “walk in the light” will enjoy heaven with Christ.

CONCLUSION

Some of the richest material about spiritual blessings is found in the book of Ephesians. This book is profound, yet practical in giving us an idea of what it means to be in Christ and enjoy His blessings. God’s great plan of redemption and salvation, as well as His limits of fellowship, are found in Ephesians. We must always remember that as we serve Christ faithfully, God’s blessings will continue to flow.

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GOD CAN

EPHESIANS 3:20

Ted J. Clarke



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INTRODUCTION

God can! These are two of the greatest and most encouraging words ever spoken or written. While the specific word order, “God can,” is not found in most of the major English translations of the Bible (KJV, ASV, NKJV, NASB, and RSV), the Scriptures are replete with citations equating to the affirmation that “God can.” *Can* is a verb meaning “to be able to do, make, or accomplish” (Mish, 165). Thus, to say God can is to say **God is able**, and there are a host of passages that speak explicitly of God’s unlimited ability to act on behalf of His children according to His will.

Consider the following:

Is any thing too hard for the LORD? (Gen. 18:14).

O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God *is there* in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? (Deu. 3:24).

Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every *thing*, and *that* no thought can be withholden from thee (Job 42:1-2).

But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Psa. 115:3).

Whatsoever the LORD pleased, *that* did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa. 135:6).

I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him (Ecc. 3:14).

Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee:...Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me? (Jer. 32:17, 27).

If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king.... Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.... Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase (Dan. 3:17, 29; 4:37).

And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.... And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.... But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible (Mat. 3:9; 10:28; 19:26).

Why doth this *man* thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? (Mark 2:7).

For with God nothing shall be impossible (Luke 1:37).

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?... And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.... Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.... Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began (Rom. 8:31; 11:23; 14:4; 16:25).

And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may abound to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8).

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 (Phi. 3:21).

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted...Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 2:18; 7:25).

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 24-25).

These are an impressive array of Scriptures. They provide encouragement for the faith of Christians that “God can!” But there is more to be said.

EPHESIANS 3:20

No passage in all of Scripture says “God can” more emphatically or completely than Ephesians 3:20:

Now unto him [God] that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Eph. 3:20-21).

Paul declared that God “is able,” which comes from the Greek word *dunamai*, meaning “to be strong enough to, be able to” (Betz, 3:601). The **power** concept in this word and its cognates “suggests the inherent capacity of someone or something to carry something out” (Betz, 3:601). It is from this Greek word that we derive some of our English words for power, like dynamite and dynamo. Paul affirms that God is able “to do,” to be active in His creation on behalf of those whom He loves. But exactly **what** is God able to do? Here is where the apostle adds words to the thought that “God can” that thrill our souls, flooding us with hope and encouragement, washing away every vestige of fear and despair.

What God is able to do is magnified by two phrases in this verse. First, God is able to do “beyond all things (*huper panta*) in respect of the absoluteness of His power” (Salmond, 3:317). Second, God is able to do “exceeding abundantly” (*huperekperissou*) (Salmond, 3:317)

beyond all things. This is one of Paul's super-superlatives in discussing the greatness of God's power to work on our behalf. God can do super-abundantly beyond all things. While the King James Version, American Standard Version, and New King James Version all use "exceeding(ly) abundantly," the New International Version says, "immeasurably more."

Further encouragement from this verse is seen in that the things about which "we ask or think," whatever they might be, are not beyond the range of God's ability to provide.

One to whose efficiency there is no limit; and then with more particular reference to the case of Paul and his fellow-believers, as able to do above measure beyond anything which our asking or even our thinking is conversant; superabundantly beyond the utmost requests we can make in prayer, nay beyond all that that can suggest to our minds in their highest ventures (Salmond, 3:317).

To be sure, that for which we ask or think about may not be in harmony with God's will at the time (cf., 1 John 5:14-15), but what encouragement it is to know that if it is His will, then nothing is too hard for God to do. It often may be that we "have not because [we] ask not" (Jam. 4:2; cf., Mat. 7:7-8).

Another commentator notes the progressive encouragement in Ephesians 3:20.

God's ability to answer prayer is forcefully stated by the apostle in a composite expression of seven stages. (1) He is able to *do* or to work (*poiesai*), for he is neither idle, nor inactive, nor dead. (2) He is able to do what *we ask*, for he hears and answers prayer. (3) He is able to do what we ask or *think*, for he reads our thoughts, and sometimes we imagine things for which we dare not and therefore do not ask. (4) He is able to do *all* that we ask or think, for he knows it all and can perform it all. (5) He is able to do *more...than* (*hyper*, 'beyond') all that we ask or think, for his expectations are higher than ours. (6) He is able to do much more, or *more abundantly* (*perissos*), than all we ask or think, for he does not give his grace by calculated measure. (7) He is able to do very much more, *far more abundantly*, than all we ask or think, for he is a God of super-abundance.... It states simply that there are no limits to what God can do (Stott, 139-140).

Ephesians 3:20 is one of the grandest and most encouraging statements in all of Scripture.

GOD'S POWER IN US

A further word of encouragement from this verse comes from Paul's declaration that God's ability to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" is also "according to the power that worketh in us." Some contend that this power at work in us must have reference to miraculous or direct power from God upon the human spirit, but that idea is neither explicit nor implicit in this text and context. Indeed, the statement is that God's great power **is** at work in the Christian, but to state that this power works in a direct fashion upon the human spirit, instead of by way of a mediate or indirect influence, is to say more than Paul stated here. Paul notes the fact of the power being in us, but not the means of the accomplishment of that fact. If I say, "I killed a deer," you would not know the means by which the act was accomplished without further revelation from me or someone who witnessed it. I may have used a gun, bow and arrow, poison, a stick of dynamite, or I may have run after the deer till I caught him and broke his neck. In our part of Arkansas one is more likely to kill a deer with a car or truck. At any rate, unless specified when the fact of some act is stated, the means by which that biblical act is accomplished must be determined elsewhere in Scripture. So it is with **how** the super abundant power of God works in us. The **how** is not given in Ephesians 3:20, though the fact is. One author observed:

Paul goes on to speak of the power "that works within us." He does not stop to spell this out, for at this point he is concerned with God and the greatness of God, not with what happens in the hearts and lives of believers. But his correspondence as a whole makes it very clear that the power of God had done great things in those who had been converted to Christianity and that it continued to do great things. He saw it as important that the humblest believer should make abundant use of the power of God that was at work in every believer. So, while he speaks here of God as working unimaginable things, those things are akin to what happens in all believers, Paul and his readers alike ("within us") (Morris, 108-109).

Certainly, the revelation and confirmation of God's will and work for mankind involved a direct and miraculous influence on men (Mark 16:17-20; Acts 14:1-3; Heb. 2:2-4). Also, in the absence of a completely revealed and recorded will of God, many in the first century church were endowed with power of the Holy Spirit from the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-18; 18:1-11; 19:1-12). These gifts

enabled the early church to have revealed and confirmed to them what God's message was to mankind, until it was fully given and written down (1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4:11-16). Once the revelation of God was completed, His power via the direct influence of inspiration and miracles of confirmation ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:11-14).

Even those who were inspired and could work miracles by the power of God were not directly empowered by God in ways that exempted them from all persecution, sickness, death, or the need to study God's revealed will (cf., 2 Cor. 11:23-30; 12:7-10; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; 4:13; et al.). That was not the purpose of giving the apostles and the early church that type of power. According to 1 Corinthians 12, that congregation had the various miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit of God, but those gifts did not prevent them from having problems in their personal lives and in the church! Nearly every chapter of that letter deals with a problem plaguing the Christians at Corinth, from sexual immorality to abuses of the Lord's Supper and denying the resurrection of Christ and our future resurrection. How did the apostle Paul seek to correct these matters, by going back to Corinth and giving them more miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit? No, absolutely not!

Did he pray that God would directly influence the minds and hearts of the Corinthians to know and do better? He did not! **He wrote them an inspired epistle, instructing them what to believe and how to act!** He reminded them that his words and writings were the mind of God and commands of Christ, given to correct and empower them (1 Cor. 2:9-16; 14:37).

Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn not *to go* beyond the things which are written; that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other (1 Cor. 4:6—ASV).

Although there was, for a time in the first century, a miraculous influence upon some Christians, the purpose was limited and “for the profit *of all*” (1 Cor. 12:7—NKJV) or “for the common good” (NASB). There was **never** a direct miraculous operation of God's power upon the hearts or spirits of men to cause them to have faith or to develop it to its fullness in a Christian's life. Why? Because “faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all active to empower Christians (Eph. 3:14-21), but that power works in us through the

medium of God's Word and not directly or miraculously. Paul told the church in Ephesus that when they read what he had written by divine inspiration, they would know indirectly what the Holy Spirit caused him to know directly (Eph. 3:3-5). What they knew through Paul's writing was **exactly** what God revealed to him. The Word of God produces gospel faith (John 20:30-31; Rom. 10:17), which is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16-17) and to sanctify (John 17:17). The Holy Spirit is active through the medium of the Word (Eph. 6:17), making the Word of God "quick, and powerful [living, and active—ASV]" (Heb. 4:12). The influence of the Holy Spirit produced Word, when believed and obeyed, is able to provide for the Christian's needs (Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:16; Acts 20:32; 1 Tim. 3:15; Jam. 1:21), equipping us and making us knowledgeable in every way God intends us to be (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:2-4).¹ God can and does work mightily in His people, and His ability is not limited when we contend that He does have to work miraculously or directly to accomplish great things in us. Commenting on the various requests in this great prayer of Paul (Eph. 3:14-21), one writer notes that the role of the Holy Spirit is not neglected, but neither is it exaggerated as some do today, claiming He is directly strengthening and developing us in our Christian lives.

In many ways the substance of the different requests amounts to the same thing. To be strengthened through the Spirit, to be indwelt by Christ, to be rooted in love, to know the love of Christ, and to be filled with the fullness of God involve different aspects of the same reality.... God, Christ, and the Spirit all receive mention in this section. In the one reference to the Spirit in v. 16 it becomes clear that in the believer's present experience his role in the inner person is functionally equivalent to that of Christ in the heart. But, as in other sections of the first part of this letter, the triad that dominates the writer's perspective is that of God, Christ, and the Church (Lincoln, 42:219-220).

Some believe that "the power that worketh in us" is a reference to our salvation and the "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3, 7; 2:4-6). Can you think of a greater power of God working in us for salvation from sin and continuing cleansing from sin (Eph. 2:8-10, 18; 1 John 1:7-10)? However, the accomplishment of any or all of the great acts required for salvation do not involve any member of the Godhead directly influencing people to obey the gospel and ignoring the free moral agency that God created within man (cf., Gen. 1-3; Rev. 22:16-19).

The “God can” of Ephesians 3:20 is a tremendously positive encouragement for the Christians of any century, first or twenty-first! God equips His family to be able to overcome all the powers of human or spiritual forces, whatever they may use to seek to destroy us. Paul said God showed that power over such forces in raising Christ to be: “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:19-21). The combined efforts of the Godhead are “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:14-21). Accordingly, “the whole armour of God” is available “that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” and to successfully “wrestle...against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world [and], against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:11-12).

The background of the Ephesian church’s beginnings shows the deep-seated belief in their society in the influence of magic, astrology, and idol spiritual deities (Acts 19:13-20ff).² The apostle’s assurance to Christian Ephesians (and us) is that no power of any magical spell, no influence of the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars, planets), no idol god nor combination of gods have any ability to overcome the infinite power of Almighty God, which He exercises on behalf of His children. Accordingly, Christians need not to fear an overpowering influence of Satan and his angels or demons in our lives. As we submit to God in obedience to His Word, we are empowered to “resist the devil, and he will flee from [us]” (Jam. 4:7-8). As we humble ourselves before God, casting our cares upon Him, maintaining soberness and vigilance, Satan may seek us as a roaring lion ready to devour us, but God enables us to “resist [Satan] stedfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:6-8). We can because “God can” and does work in us. Paul proclaimed, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi. 4:13).

THE NATURE OF GOD

The Names of God

We do not have sufficient space to consider all the revealed names of God, but some of them touch on the “God can” theme of our lesson.

El Shaddai is a Hebrew name for God translated in our English Bibles as “God Almighty,” “Almighty God,” or “Almighty.” It first appears in Genesis 17:1 and is found 48 times in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the Greek word *pantokrator* is found eight times

and bears the same basic meaning. Obviously, if God is **all mighty**, there is none mightier, and any who possess power can only do so by God's permission. Therefore, God has the power to control any situation that may arise, whether dealing with individual Christians, the church, nations (Jer. 18:7-10), or the world overall (Gen. 8:22; 2 Pet. 3:5-7). In Revelation 1:8 Christ is identified as the Almighty, partaking of the same divine nature of the Father (cf., Rev. 4:8). God can because He is Almighty!

El Elyon is the Hebrew for the "Most High God." The Greek word is *hupsistos*, meaning "highest." If God is Most High or Highest, there can be none higher or greater (Dan. 3:26; Acts 16:17). This name reflects the Sovereign nature of God, meaning that He is the Absolute and Sole Ruler of all creation. God is the only uncreated Being. Therefore, everything else is under His control, and He is able to make all things work out for our good, regardless of the intentions of others (Rom. 8:28; Gen. 50:20; Jam. 1:2-4).

Jehovah is generally considered to be God's personal covenant name and is translated from the Hebrew *YHWH* in the American Standard Version nearly 6,800 times. (The reason the ancient written Hebrew name was spelled *YHWH* is that it did not use vowels. See any standard Bible dictionary for an interesting explanation of how *Jehovah* came to be used in the American Standard Version but has not been generally used in other standard translations.) In the King James Version, where the Hebrew *YHWH/Jehovah* appears, the translators typeset the name as LORD instead of using the lower case Lord, although *Jehovah* is used by itself in the King James Version four times (Exo. 6:3; Psa. 83:18; Isa. 12:2; 26:4) and in combination with other words three times (Gen. 22:14; Exo. 17:15; Jud. 6:24) (Strong, 556). Most present day language scholars believe *Yahweh* (yaw-way) is closer to the original spelling of the ancient Hebrew name than *Jehovah*, but it is the meaning of the name that is important. In Exodus 3:14 God called Himself, "I AM THAT I AM" and this is generally thought to be related to the meaning of *Jehovah/LORD*, referring to God as "the self-existent one" or "He who is and will continue to be." These exalt God's all mighty power and His eternity.

Jehovah God is a close personal God, not a distant impersonal Deity who has no real care or concern for His creatures. God knows the very number of hairs on your head (Mat. 10:30). The psalmist indicates that

God knew us and had a plan for us even before we were born. “Thine eyes did see mine unformed substance; And in thy book they were all written, *Even* the days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was none of them” (Psa. 139:16—ASV; cf., NKJV). This personal God loved us so much “that he gave his only begotten Son” that we might be saved from our sins (John 3:16). This same personal God has given us the right to cast “all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). This same person describes Himself as our Father and we as His children (2 Cor. 6:17-18). How great is that?! Finally, this great Jehovah God, who made His New Covenant with us (Heb. 8:8-13), has promised us, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). To this promise the Hebrews writer responded: “So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (v. 6). How thrilling it is to have God’s Word describe these great personal benefits available to us from our Great Personal Jehovah God. Untold millions have embraced these precious truths and God has been with them through trials and tribulations that would crush and destroy unbelievers. **God can because God cares!** (Wyatt, 2:504-508).

Some Attributes of God

Just as the names of God are too numerous to list them all, so are the attributes of God’s character which describe what He is like. However further consideration of a few items will be helpful.

God’s eternality is significant to “God can.” Nothing in this created world lasts very long: possessions, relationships, life itself are fleeting things. However, God is everlasting, eternal. He always has been and always will be. One great passage is: “The eternal God *is thy* refuge, and underneath *are* the everlasting arms” (Deu. 33:27). The eternal God is in heaven, but with us at the same time. He is a refuge, a dwelling place or hiding place. “Thou *art* my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah” (Psa. 32:7). “Thou *art* my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word” (Psa. 119:114). God is a refuge because of His “everlasting arms.” Arms are symbolic of power, protecting and providing for us (cf., Psa. 89:13; 44:3). God’s arms are “everlasting arms” because they never fail, their strength is never lost, He is always there (cf., Heb. 13:5-6). God can because He ever lives!

We have already discussed God’s Almighty Power (omnipotence). One other thought is that we can choose to leave God’s protection, but

no power, human or spirit, can take us from the hand of God who is greater than all (John 10:28-29). We will be “kept by the power of God,” but we “through faith” have to make the choice to not leave Him (1 Pet. 1:5). God can because He has the power!

God is also all-knowing (omniscient). “Great *is* our Lord, and of great power: his understanding *is* infinite [without limits]” (Psa. 147:5). First John 3:20 assures us that “God...knoweth all things.” Hebrews 4:13 puts it this way: “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.” While this frightens those who want to do their evil deeds unseen by men or God, it should be a source of great comfort to Christians. It is true that the primary sense of the passage is judgment, but a corollary thought is that since God sees all, our needs are never out of His sight. He always knows where we are and what we need most in our lives. God can because He knows!

A final attribute to consider is that God is everywhere-present (omnipresent), meaning that He is not limited by space or distance. He is universally present everywhere. The Old Testament book of Jonah shows it is impossible to run away or hide from God, but this attribute has a great positive side we will see in a moment. God enabled Israel to defeat the Syrian armies twice in a short period of time because the Syrians thought Israel’s *gods* were gods of the hills but not gods of the plains and valleys (1 Kin. 20:23-28). The Lord showed them He is a God Who is everywhere. Later, when Judah began to think of God as limited, He asked, “*Am* I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD” (Jer. 23:23-24).

While the thought of God’s omnipresence might be fearful to some, God’s children rejoice in it! In Psalm 139:1-6 David considered the all-knowing nature of God, and in verses 7-10 he expounds upon the benefit of knowing that God is everywhere with him.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand **lead me**, and thy right hand shall **hold me**.

Sheol is the place of the dead, unseen by men, but God is present in a special way to those who love Him (cf., Luke 16: 19-31). David exults

in God always being present to lead us and to protect us. God can because He is there! (Cottrell, 241-305).

SOME FURTHER APPLICATIONS

With the understanding that our will is not always God's will (Isa. 55:8-9; Jer. 10:23; Mat. 26:39; 1 John 5:14-15), let us consider some practical applications of the knowledge that "God can." How should our faith relate to the idea that "God can"? First, we should pray as Christ taught, that "[God's] will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven" (Mat. 6:10). Second, we must be willing to **accept** what happens in life when our desires are not God's will for us. Third, we must constantly remind ourselves that heaven awaits only those who **do** the will of God (Mat. 7:21). Fourth, our walk in life must be in wisdom, constantly **seeking** to understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph. 5:15-17). Fifth, pray for ourselves and others "that [we] might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9).

God can **provide for us an eternal home for the soul** where every good thing is present and every evil absent (Rev. 21:1-8, 27). Think about Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." If God can create a universe for man's habitation as vast and as complex as it is, and if God can create mankind of flesh and spirit (with even greater complexity) and in His own image, why would anyone doubt that God **can** do whatever He promises in relation to our future home?

God can **save us eternally from our sins**. Yes, our sins separate us from God and He can and will punish impenitent sinners eternally (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 2:8-9; Mat. 10:28). He does not want that to be the destiny of anyone, for God desires "all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4; cf., 2 Pet. 3:9; Eze. 18:20-23). God can and will save all those who are faithful to Him in Christ, because "the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23; 5:8-11). Do not ever doubt that "God can" and will save those who love Him (John 14:23)!

God can "**be touched with the feeling of our infirmities**" (Heb. 4:14-16). Jesus was "made like unto *his* [us], that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest," and because "he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour [come to the aid of] them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:17-18). Brethren, think about this. Jesus took

on Himself the nature of flesh and blood and was tempted in all points as we are (Heb. 2:14; 4:15). He knows exactly how you and I feel in struggling through this life. He knows temptation, hunger and thirst, sleeplessness, betrayal by friends and family, hatred from those He sought to help, physical suffering and death, anguish in compassion for others, and on and on we could go. God can provide comfort in the distresses of this life, as promised in the great Shepherd psalm (Psa. 23:4; cf., 71:19-21). Paul emphatically says, “Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation” (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

God can **hear and answer our prayers** (1 Pet. 3:12; 1 John 5:14-15). Perhaps much of what we have not is because we ask not (Jam. 4:2). Remember, according to Ephesians 3:20, God “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” James 5:16 reminds us that faithfulness in our lives makes prayer “availeth much.” Another wonderful Scripture regarding prayer teaches us that even when we are so burdened and grieved we cannot utter a coherent prayer, God can know our hearts and needs by His Holy Spirit, “he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*” (Rom. 8:26-27).

God can **communicate His will to us through His divine word**. The Lord revealed His will to us through selected men whom He inspired (1 Cor. 2:9-13). When those men spoke or wrote, that was God speaking and writing to mankind (cf., Mat. 22:31-32; 1 Cor. 14:37; Rev. 2:1, 7; et al.). While we have no inspired men today currently speaking or writing God’s will, when we read what the inspired men wrote in the Bible, God is speaking to us (Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). That Word is all-sufficient and fully revealed once for all time (Jude 3; 2 Pet. 1:3). God can and has communicated His will to us so we can know what pleases or displeases Him. He is our Heavenly Father who teaches us everything we need to know to have happy fulfilling lives here and hereafter. Some turn to dumb idol gods, or the stars for direction, but neither can communicate in words as our God can and has (Jer. 10:1-10; Deu. 4:19; Isa. 47:13). God’s Word assures and encourages us about all that “God can” do!

CONCLUSION

The entire Bible is a book about what God can do, has done, and will do. God’s call to all men to live a Christian life is the best possible life one can have (2 The. 2:13-15). The Christian life is a “can do” life

because we serve a “God who can do” everything we need to be faithful and successful, receiving “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven” for us (1 Pet. 1:4-5).

Paul said to the Christians at Thessalonica:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it not as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 The. 2:13).

The Bible is a “can do Word” from our “can do God.” What an encouragement to know “we can” because “God can.”

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ENDNOTES

¹This truth is being challenged today by some in the Lord’s church, particularly by Roy and Mac Deaver and those following their teaching in this area. Mac contends for a *direct* operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers to help them learn God’s Word and live faithful lives. Others, lesser known than the Deavers, have spread this false doctrine which threatens the truth of the gospel and the welfare of the Lord’s church. For a good refutation of the Deavers’ position, stated plainly and powerfully, see: Cates, Curtis A. (1998), “*Does the Holy Spirit Operate Directly Upon the Heart of a Saint?*”: *A Review of Neo-Calvinism Among the Lord’s People* (Olive Branch, MS: Cates Publications).

²A helpful work in further exploring this concept is Arnold, Clinton E. (1992), *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books).

PRESSING TOWARD THE MARK

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14

Ira Y. Rice, Jr.



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INTRODUCTION

From a Roman prison to his beloved brethren at Philippi, among other things, the apostle Paul wrote, saying,

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, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Phi. 3:7-14).

THINGS COUNTED AS *GAIN* THAT PAUL SUFFERED *LOSS* THAT HE MIGHT *WIN CHRIST*

When the Lord appeared in a vision to “a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias” (Acts 9:10-16), among things most would consider *gain* that Paul (then called Saul) had was “authority from the chief priests” (Acts 9:14). The Lord told Ananias, “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). Giving up that *authority* and *suffering the consequences*, in themselves alone, would be *loss* indeed.

Moreover, consider his *status* as a foremost, young Jewish scholar which no longer would be his to enjoy. When making his defense before the Jewish people in Jerusalem (Acts 22), among other things, he said,

I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

To have studied “at the feet of Gamaliel,” the most renowned Jewish scholar of his time, was accounted a signal honor indeed.

Going back to the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, it is evident that Paul (then called Saul) ranked high in the esteem of both the high priest and the Jewish Sanhedrin, for when they cast Stephen out of the city and stoned him, Acts 7:58 informs us that “the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.” Acts 8:1, 3 further states that “Saul was consenting unto his death,” making “havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison.”

That young Saul could seek and be granted letters of authority by the high priest within itself demonstrated extraordinary recognition for a youth such as he. Yet Acts 9:1-2 clearly shows that is exactly what happened. For Saul himself to become a member of the very *way* that he was persecuting, meant giving up all such recognition, authority, honor, and power.

SAUL EXCHANGED BEING A RECOGNIZED SCHOLAR IN THE JEWISH RELIGION FOR THE MUCH HIGHER KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST

In the passage under consideration, among other things, Paul declared, "I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

That Paul possessed great *human* knowledge, through intensive study on his own part and through being taught by Gamaliel, was acknowledged by all. Even Festus, when Paul made his defense before King Agrippa, declared, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" (Acts 26:24). But Paul rejoined:

I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner (Acts 26:25-26).

As for the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phi. 3:8), his Lord, Paul told the brethren of Galatia that he did not receive it "of man" but by *revelation* from Jesus Christ Himself! In Galatians 1:11-2:10, he said:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in 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. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me. Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation,

lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

From the foregoing passage, Paul made clear that he did not receive his knowledge of Christ Jesus through self-study or through being taught by others, but by the gospel of Christ being *revealed* in Him from on high, *i.e.*, by *divine revelation*. It therefore was in this special sense that he “count[ed] 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” (Phi. 3:8).

WHAT ALL WAS ENTAILED IN THE *SUFFERINGS* OF PAUL?

When Paul mentions having “suffered the loss of all things” that he might win Christ, much more was involved than some may suppose.

No sooner had Saul become obedient to what he called the *heavenly vision* (Acts 26:19) than the things he must suffer for the name's sake of Jesus Christ began to be apparent. After tarrying with the disciples at Damascus “certain days,” straightway in the synagogues he “preached Christ...that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). He did not do this just once, then stop, but over the course of *many days* he “increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ” (Acts 9:22-23). So incensed were the Jews at his preaching that they conspired to kill him (Acts 9:23). Knowing of their *laying await* and that they were watching the

gates day and night to kill Saul, the disciples “took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket” (Acts 9:25).

Even after thus escaping from the Damascus Jews, when Saul reached Jerusalem and “assayed to join himself to the disciples...they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26). It was not until Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and explained what had happened to him that he was received (Acts 9:27-28).

But when Saul preached boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed with the Grecian Jews, “they went about to slay him” (Acts 9:29), leading the Jerusalem brethren to bring him down to Caesarea and thence to his home city of Tarsus to save his life (Acts 9:30).

Quite some time thereafter, Barnabas went “to Tarsus, for to seek Saul” (Acts 11:25). Finding him, Barnabas brought him to Antioch where they assembled with the church a whole year and “taught much people” (Acts 11: 26). It was at Antioch, evidently while Saul was there, that the disciples were “called Christians first.”

It *also* was at Antioch that the Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2).

They had not gotten past the isle of Cyprus, the first main stop on their first missionary journey, before Elymas the sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, withstood them, seeking to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith (Acts 13:6-12). (From this point onward, Saul was called Paul, and took the lead from Barnabas.)

Loosing from Cyprus, they returned to the mainland at Perga, in Pamphylia, where John Mark abandoned them, returning to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). From Perga, Paul and Barnabas went on north to Antioch in Pisidia, where, at first, they were well received. But when the Jews saw almost the whole city coming together to hear the Word of God, being filled with envy, they spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming (Acts 13:14-45).

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said:

It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the

word of the Lord was published throughout all the region (Acts 13:46-49).

Hearing this, the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women as well as the chief men of the city, raising a persecution of Paul and Barnabas, and driving them out of their midst.

A similar thing happened at Iconium, except there both Gentiles as well as Jews were stirred up by unbelieving Jews. An assault was made both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews to “use *them* spitefully, and to stone them” (Acts 14:1-5).

At Lystra, though at first Paul and Barnabas were looked upon as “gods...come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11), when certain Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, they

persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew *him* out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe (Acts 14:19-20).

So it was wherever Paul went throughout his illustrious career as the greatest missionary for Christ who ever lived. Whereas many of those he preached the gospel to believed and were converted, just as many (maybe more) refused his preaching and wanted to kill him. Truly he had to suffer *great things* for the name of Jesus Christ.

PAUL’S RIGHTEOUSNESS WAS NOT “OF THE LAW” BUT “OF FAITH.”

While still serving the Jewish religion, as he had just recounted in Philippians 3, Paul itemized the righteousness he previously enjoyed while still under the law, saying:

If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (Phi. 3:4-6).

Concerning that “righteousness which is in the law”: when brought before the Jewish council, Paul could say, “Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). As long as Paul regarded the Jewish law as yet binding, he lived according to its precepts. It was only after he was conscientiously convicted that it had been “nailed to the cross” and a new law was instituted to take its place that Paul started basing his righteousness on the new rather than the old.

Regarding the former law, Paul had written to the Galatians, saying:

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise (Gal. 3:1-18).

Should any ask: "Wherefore then serveth the law?" Paul went on to explain that "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19). As for the law being against the promise of God, he continued:

God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the

children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have 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 (Gal. 3:21-29).

Thus, Paul could argue to the Philippians that his own righteousness was no longer “of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phi. 3:9). Had such not been the case, he continued, he could not have *known* Christ, nor the *power of His resurrection*, nor the *fellowship of His sufferings*, being made *conformable unto His death*, if by any means, he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead (Phi. 3:10-11).

PAUL DID NOT COUNT HIMSELF TO HAVE ATTAINED ALREADY.

Some among us today contend that they *already*, in fact, have eternal life. They base this belief on an interpretation of such passages as John 5:24, wherein Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” By overly emphasizing the words “**hath** everlasting life” and “**is passed** from death unto life,” they have Jesus teaching more than the apostle Paul, himself, understood to be the case.

Though he knew nothing against himself, having “lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1), and exercising himself, to have always “a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16), yet, evincing at least the *possibility* for him still to be lost, he told the Corinthians: “I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27).

Had there been no possibility of losing his “crown of righteousness,” why would he base his hope of that crown on the fact that he had “fought a good fight,” “finished [his] course,” and “kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7-8)? Or why should John quote Jesus Christ saying in Revelation 2:10: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,” since, faithful or not, he would receive it anyway?

PAUL DWELLED NOT ON THINGS PAST BUT ON THINGS YET TO COME.

Although as an earlier persecutor of Christians, Paul knew that he had committed egregious sins, yet, if he had dwelled on those things, he could not have accomplished the marvelous evangelism that he did. Grateful for the mercy which the Lord had shown him, he said:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemers, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief... This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (1 Tim. 1:12-13, 15).

Realizing that he could not undo his past, Paul wrote the Philippians that he was “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Phi. 3:13). We see this emphasis on *things before* in what he wrote to “all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be saints*” (Rom. 1:7), saying:

God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also (Rom. 1:9-15).

Toward the close of his Roman letter, Paul lamented that he had been *much hindered* from coming to them by his work for Christ in other places. Even then he was on his way to Jerusalem near the end of his third missionary journey to minister to the poor saints there. But as soon as that was done, he hoped to stop by Rome on his way to Spain. The passage reads:

I have been much hindered from coming to you. But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with you

company. But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain (Rom. 15:22-28).

Indeed Paul was destined to go to Rome—though not in the capacity envisioned by his forward-looking message. While in Jerusalem this time, unbelieving Jews would conspire to kill him, resulting in his being taken into protective custody by Roman authorities, taken to Caesarea by night, defending himself against his accusers before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, appealing to Caesar, and eventually being taken to Rome as a prisoner of the Roman government. In any case, however, he did not dwell on “things which [were] behind” but reached forward unto “those things which [were] before.”

PAUL “PRESS[ED] TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE.”

In so many of Paul’s epistles, as well as his record in the Book of Acts, we sense the forward struggle that he might “apprehend that for which [he was] apprehended of Christ Jesus.” From the outset of his conversion, never for one moment did he hold back, but always pressed forward.

For example, right there on the road to Damascus, once Jesus told him that persecuting the church was the same as persecuting the Lord Himself, his first concern was “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6) Proceeding on into Damascus, he refused either to eat or drink until the Lord sent Ananias to tell him what he must do (Acts 9:8-16). As soon as Ananias told him, Saul “arose, and was baptized” (Acts 9:17-18).

Regardless of how dangerous it was to do so, *straightway* (after his baptism) Saul “preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). Even when those who heard him in the synagogues questioned why he now preached what he had just been destroying, Saul, undeterred, “increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ” (Acts 9:21-22).

When the Damascus Jews took counsel to kill him, instead of giving up his new-found faith, Saul returned to Jerusalem “assay[ing] to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26). It required special intervention on the part of Barnabas before the Jerusalem disciples would receive him; however, rather than being intimidated, Saul “spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians [Jews]” who “went about to slay him” (Acts 9:27-29).

Fearful that the Jews would actually kill him, Saul’s Jerusalem brethren took him down to Caesarea, sending him thence to his home city of Tarsus (Acts 9:30), whence he stayed until Barnabas later sought him and brought him to Antioch where they assembled for a whole year with the church there and “taught much people” (Acts 11:25-26).

Is it any wonder that when the Holy Spirit decided who best to send to the Gentile world in regions beyond, he said to the church at Antioch, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2)!

When they sailed to Cyprus and were preaching the Word of God to the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, and a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, named Barjesus (also called Elymas) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith, who was it that by the power of the Holy Spirit struck the sorcerer blind? It was Saul (from then on called Paul), who set eyes on him, and said:

O full of all subtilty and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord *is* upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season (Acts 13:10-11).

And immediately there fell on Elymas a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. And the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord (Acts 13:6-12).

At Antioch in Pisidia, when the rulers of the synagogue invited Paul and Barnabas, saying, “*Ye* men *and* brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on” (Acts 13:15), it was Paul who took the initiative. Standing up and beckoning with his hand, he delivered the marvelous discourse recorded in verses 16 through 41. Paul so powerfully persuaded the Jews that the afore-promised seed of David

whom God had raised unto Israel as a Savior was Jesus, whom the Jerusalem Jews had caused Pilate to crucify, and whom God had raised from the dead, that the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the following Sabbath. Paul still was “pressing toward the mark.”

When almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God, and the unbelieving Jews were filled with envy when they saw the multitude, rather than falling silent, Paul and Barnabas *waxed bold*, turning to the Gentiles: “And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region” (Acts 13:44-49).

At Iconium, even though “the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren” (Acts 14:1-2), they abode there a long time, “speaking boldly in the Lord” (Acts 14:3). When “an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them,” rather than giving up, they “fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel” (Acts 14:5-7).

At Lystra, when “*certain* Jews from Antioch and Iconium...persuaded the people...[who] stoned Paul, drew *him* out of the city, supposing he had been dead” (Acts 14:19), Paul rose up and came right back in, departing the next day with Barnabas for Derbe (Acts 14:20).

After preaching the gospel to Derbe, he and Barnabas, oblivious to the danger:

returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:21-22).

When they got back to Antioch, “from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled,” rather than lamenting and complaining at the jeopardy they had barely survived, they gathered the church together and “rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:26-27).

Going on through the rest of the Book of Acts, similar things happened to Paul that he experienced on his first missionary journey. To the Ephesian elders, after he called them to Miletus, he said unto them:

Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility

of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: *And* how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:18-24).

Later on, at Caesarea, when a certain prophet, named Agabus, came down from Judea, he took Paul's girdle and bound his own hands and feet, saying:

Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done (Acts 21:11-14).

That absolutely nothing could deter Paul from "press[ing] toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" is evident from what he wrote in his second letter to the church at Corinth:

I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. 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 labours 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 (2 Cor. 11:21-28).

That, as he saw the end of his long life as a missionary approaching, he was convinced that *the prize* would soon be his to enjoy, is clear from his second letter to Timothy, wherein he said:

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

It is this author's conviction that if the Great Commission of our Lord is ever to be fulfilled again, as Paul said it was in his day (Col. 1:23), more *Pauls* must be raised up among us who will faithfully "press toward the mark"—regardless of circumstances—until the battle is done, the victory is won, and we can lay our armor down at Jesus' feet.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

WE CAN REJOICE PHILIPPIANS 4:4

Tim Smith



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“Rejoice in the Lord *alway*: *and* again I say, Rejoice” (Phi. 4:4).

The concept of “rejoicing in the Lord” is, itself, controversial in some circles, and has been so historically. There are some who view the life of the faithful servant of the Lord as nothing more than a gloomy and dreary existence in which one lives regretting past mistakes and striving unto future improvement. Whereas we should regret past mistakes (to a point), and whereas we should strive on unto perfection, there is also a place for joy in our lives as Christians. To rejoice *alway* is as confusing to many as is the injunction from the pen of the same inspired man to “pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17). To some, *rejoicing* is simply not possible under certain circumstances. Yet the apostle commands us to *rejoice* always. It will be our purpose in these few lines to discuss the meaning of Paul’s statement and its application to our lives now.

“Rejoice” in the verse before us is from the Greek *chairo* which means “to rejoice, to be glad, to feel and/or express joy.” The religion of Jesus Christ is not opposed to enjoying life; in fact, passages such as this indicate just the opposite. We are, of all people, in possession of legitimate reasons for rejoicing. Not all of life is frivolous, nor is all of it stoic; there is a happy medium between the two extremes, a state of mind which enables one to have a sense of joy about him despite the

circumstances in which he finds himself. This sense of joy enables him to maintain a proper attitude and a spirit of sobriety even in times of celebration. Paul was in possession of just such an attitude, as he often indicated in addressing the troubles with which he was faced. Of himself he said, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10). How can one be *sorrowful* and yet always rejoicing? It is only when one realizes the ultimate end of the faithful and acts in the light of his God-given purpose for existence that he is able to rejoice in troubling times.

Paul penned the epistle from which our text comes while a prisoner of the civil authorities—not for any legitimate crime of which he was guilty, but merely for preaching the gospel in the name of the risen Christ. Most people would find little reason for rejoicing under such circumstances, indeed, many would doubtless lash out in anger at the injustice of it all. Paul, however, was able to look beyond the trouble of the present to the greater good he was accomplishing in the work of the Lord. In Philippi Paul and Silas had been beaten publicly and put into the inner prison (Acts 16:23-24). This gives us a little insight as to the conditions in which the initial recipients of this epistle lived. They were facing, no doubt, similar persecutions as those faced by Paul and Silas. Yet, he tells them to *rejoice always*. How could they do this? Only by considering the limited span of suffering in comparison with the endless heaven awaiting them. “Enjoyment is not a goal, it is a feeling that accompanies important ongoing activity” (Paul Goodman, poet). If joy is nothing more than *good times* and external happiness, then neither was Paul nor the brethren to whom he wrote happy. If, however, true joy is to be found in the ongoing activity, which in this case was the faithful execution of the will of God, then both Paul and the brethren in Philippi were joyous. There is a sense in which one who has known no suffering or pain can little experience true joy. If we have never parted from a loved one, we often take the loved ones we have for granted and fail to appreciate them and to treat them properly. Paul knew pain. He knew disappointment, persecution, sin, suffering, sorrow—in short, he knew what it was like to be without joy in the physical sense, and he therefore appreciated true spiritual joy. Oscar Homoka once said, “To really enjoy the better things in life, one must first have experienced the things they are better than.” In the life of Paul, we see that he did experience the lesser, and therefore appreciated the greater.

True joy is much larger than the outward expressions men make in times of happiness. Laughter does not necessarily indicate a truly happy person any more than do tears necessarily indicate a distraught soul. We shed tears of joy when we have labored long and hard to accomplish something and are finally blessed with the successful completion of our task. We shed tears at the passing of loved ones, even loved ones in whose salvation we have full confidence. Is there not joy in the shedding of such tears? We are convinced that they have ended their troubles and have passed to a far better place, yet we still sorrow at being parted from them. The *rejoicing* of which the apostle writes is that joy which looks, not at the temporal, but at the spiritual. This principle is well illustrated in 2 Samuel 12. David has fasted and prayed and besought the Lord on behalf of the child born as a result of his fornication with Bathsheba. He has done all that he can to prevent the death of the child, but finally the child dies. The record states:

Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed *himself*, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing *is* this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, *while it was* alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell *whether* GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me (2 Sam. 12:20-23).

We have no doubt that he was *sad* at the passing, but he looked beyond his present separation to the time of reunion. It is only when we do this that we are able to rejoice under such circumstances.

Isaiah described Jesus as a man of sorrow:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his

generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief (Isa. 53:3-10).

Such a description might make one think that His life was filled with nothing but grief and totally devoid of rejoicing; yet we read, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full” (John 15:11). He was a man of sorrow who rejoiced evermore. How? He looked beyond the rejection and persecution and crucifixion to the good His life accomplished.

In times of great trouble, especially trouble occasioned by the faithful behaving themselves as the Lord demands, our rejoicing is not diminished. Though some might not think so, great persecution often occasions great rejoicing. Facing invasion and death, the people of Judah worried about their fate. The prophet Habakkuk told them:

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit *be* in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall be* no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God *is* my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ *feet*, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places (Hab. 3:17-19).

Despite what they faced physically, God would save the righteous. That was cause for rejoicing. It is in this sense that we take Paul’s words.

The faith one possesses is directly related to his ability to truly rejoice in the Lord. If one doubts, if one is ignorant of the truth, if one is negligent of duty, that one cannot rejoice properly. He simply does not have what it takes to truly rejoice. He may think himself happy, but his happiness is bound to fail him at some point, if not here at least hereafter. Though confidence (faith) is the specific subject of 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:4, there is no separating the concept of rejoicing from it. The apostle said:

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a

building of God, an 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: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

How can an unfaithful person have such confidence? How can a faithful person, in possession of such confidence, fail to rejoice? The rejoicing of the Christian is tied to his faith, indeed, to his faithful adherence to the principles of truth.

This *rejoicing* is to be “in the Lord.” We know that we are not to be *happy* about everything (for example, we are not happy at the commission of a sin, etc.). We are made glad at the conversion of a sinner, the restoration of an erring child of God, a particular advance in the work of the Lord, and many such things that are in themselves good and noble. Our accomplishments (or those of others) cause us to rejoice only when those accomplishments are themselves pleasing to God. When something happens that is sinful, whether it be persecution or whatever, we may rejoice inasmuch as we are not the ones doing it, we will have to experience such things only for a short while, etc. We are never made happy in the commission of a sin, but we can rejoice despite such commission if we are faithful to the Lord. We know that He will take us to a place free from all such things in the end (Rev. 21:27).

To rejoice in the Lord, in a sense, is to find joy in Who He is, what He did, and what He promises to do in the future.

Who is He? He is “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). He is the “blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). In Him are Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms fulfilled (Luke 24:44). He is the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16). He is the perfect example (1 Pet. 2:21). He is the High Priest who experienced every temptation with which we are faced and is therefore sympathetic to us in our hour of need (Heb. 4:15). He is the One through Whom we are granted access to the Father (1 Tim. 2:5). He is the Judge before whom all shall stand (John 12:48), and Who will give eternal rest to the faithful (2 Cor. 5:10). How can one fail to rejoice if he is in possession of such knowledge?

What did He do? He perfectly fulfilled every prophecy that went before concerning Him (Luke 24:44). It has been estimated that there are over 300 prophecies which He fulfilled. Everything about Him was just as it needed to be; nothing was lacking in any respect. He stilled storms, cast out demons, fed 5,000 with only a young man's dinner, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, and so much more. He was the master teacher: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mat. 7:28-29). He demonstrated in every way that He was (is) the Christ. He refuted the teachers of the law whose intent was to catch Him in some error. He cleansed the temple of those who took the holy and made it profane. He suffered all things, though totally undeserving of any suffering. How can one whose life is properly ordered fail to rejoice in light of these things?

What has He promised to do in the future? Concerning our lives now, He has promised to help us overcome temptations:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it* (1 Cor. 10:13).

He has promised to return for His faithful followers in victory, and to banish the wicked eternally:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 The. 1:7-9).

How can one know these things and fail to rejoice?

There are some specific occasioning factors that cause us to rejoice today, for example: What about hearing the truth preached without compromise? Does it not cause us to rejoice when one breaks forth the bread of life in the midst of a world of sin? Paul commanded, "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). When that is done: we rejoice. We have seen many do otherwise, and such things grieve us. We are made to rejoice when one, like Jude of old, contends earnestly for the faith (Jude 3). We should rejoice when a faithful preacher attacks sin and uplifts Christ, as did Jeremiah so long ago:

Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:9-10).

We rejoice when we see a man or woman faithfully following the Lord. David wrote:

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night (Psa. 1:1-2).

When I consider the lives of others, some of whom seem to have everything *against* them in their effort to be faithful, and see them faithfully following the Lord, I am made to rejoice. When the elderly couple, despite their ailments and physical limitations, makes their way to the assembly to worship God, I rejoice. When the young person overcomes peer pressure and refuses to succumb to the temptations associated with their age, I rejoice. When the young family, facing financial difficulties as well as so many other troubles, stays together though many of their friends walk away from the bond of holy matrimony, I rejoice.

When a faithful soldier of the Cross finishes his/her course and goes to be with the Lord, though I may miss them and grieve their absence, I rejoice in the knowledge that they have gone to that place for which my heart longs. There are so many opportunities to sin, to fall by the wayside, to turn aside. To see one who remained true through it all, and to hear the confident longing in their voice as death approaches is cause for joy.

To rejoice in difficult circumstances is possible, but only if we look heavenward and walk in harmony with the dictates sent forth by the Lord. The key to this commandment is in the faith of the obedient, not in the circumstances of life. May we ever rejoice in Him.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

PEACE PASSING UNDERSTANDING PHILIPPIANS 4:7

Michael Shepherd



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INTRODUCTION

The overriding theme of this series of studies, *Encouraging Statements Of The Bible*, is so beneficial to the Christian on time side of life.

When we consider the difficulties we face religiously, personally, and also in this society, we are certainly in need of daily encouragement. It is not easy to live the Christian life and handle constant barrages and onslaught of sickness, suffering, failing health, bereavement, crime, political corruption, and discouragement.

When we have daily exhortation and the peace which passes all understanding, we will remain steadfast in faith. The inward peace that allows Christians to be happy and content in the midst of all the reverses of life passes all understanding by the world.

God has promised peace which “passeth all understanding” and that peace shall keep our mind. God’s peace is standing guard over our minds, protecting us from anything which would seek to disrupt it.

The peace which comes from God passes all understanding, and those of the world who look upon it do not understand it. It is beyond man’s intellect to fully comprehend. Consider some passages confirming this biblical truth. “All things work together for good to them that

love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Job states that we cannot find out God unto perfection (Job 11:7) because of who He is and that God does great things which we cannot comprehend (Job 37:5). “Lo, these *are* parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard [known] of him?” (Job 26:14). Paul reveals that God’s ways are past finding out (Rom. 11:33) and that God’s love passes knowledge (Eph. 3:19). Isaiah reveals, “*There is* no searching of his understanding” (Isa. 40:28). The psalmist reveals that God’s understanding is infinite (Psa. 147:5), and our text states that God’s peace surpasses all understanding (Phi. 4:7). However, we can know, comprehend, find out, and understand what God has revealed to us in His Word. As we take the revelation of the Almighty, we shall uncover some of these encouraging truths about the peace of God which “*passeth* all understanding.”

PEACE DEFINED

Peace (the Greek *eirene*) is found in every New Testament book with the exception of 1 John. Its meaning is the opposite of war and dissension. Among individuals, peace, harmony, and a sense of divine favor is to be without trouble or to have no worries. Thus, the basic meaning would involve the absence of war, both physically and metaphorically, wholeness, contentment, security, inner satisfaction, tranquility, prosperity, and every kind of good.

In the Old Testament, the equivalent word *shalom* meant “wholeness, soundness, well-being, more particularly, peace as opposed to war, or concord as opposed to strife.” Peace is the normal condition of men in relationships with others, in the family unit, in the church. This peace has its source in the Almighty. This peace “**passeth** all understanding” *Passeth* literally means “to hold or have above, metaphorically, to be superior to, extend over something.”

Understanding is the organ of mental perception and apprehension, of conscious life, intelligent understanding, what is in the mind, thought, counsel, purpose. Putting all these definitions together, a simple reading would be, “the peace of God which surpasses all power of comprehension.”

PEACE WITH GOD

To have this peace, peace must first be made with God. There are three that must be in agreement: one’s brother, one’s self, and God. My

brother and I must be in perfect agreement with God. The way of God is for His people to be at peace. “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15). “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom. 5:1). Peace is a part of God’s eternal nature. “Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen” (Rom. 15:33). “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16:20). “The God of peace” (Phi. 4:9; 1 The. 5:23; Heb. 13:20) will fill us with all peace (Rom. 15:13; 2 The. 3:16).

How Is this Peace Obtained?

Christian peace is made with God through Christ (Phi. 4:7). The Old Testament clearly shows that sin separates God and man (Isa. 59:1-2). “Now the God of peace...through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20); that is, Jesus Christ who is our peace (Eph. 2:14). He made peace (Eph. 2:15), preached peace (Eph. 2:17), and when we obey the gospel of peace (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15) we will wind up in the kingdom of peace (Rom. 14:17). Notice how the prophets correctly gave hope (Rom. 15:4) to the Christian age. “And I will make with them a covenant of peace” (Eze. 34:25); moreover, “I will make a covenant of peace with them” (Eze. 37:26). “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts” (Hag. 2:9).

And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion *shall be* from sea *even* to sea, and from the river *even* to the ends of the earth (Zec. 9:10).

The way of God in the Old Testament was for His people to “depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it” (Psa. 34:14), and to “love the truth and peace” (Zec. 8:19), and “execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates” (Zec. 8:16). Then the God of peace (1 Cor. 14:33) will keep you in perfect peace (Isa. 26:3).

PEACE WITH CHRIST

Holy Writ reveals to us prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the Christ as the prince of peace. Speaking of Him, we read:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and

to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

At the birth of Jesus there were a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13-14). Peace is made through Christ (Phi. 4:7), and He is our peace (Eph. 2:14). He made peace (Eph. 2:15) and preached peace (Eph. 2:17).

How Does This Peace Come Through Christ?

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). The peace mentioned here refers to the peace with God that exists because we have the remission of sins. Peace with God comes through faithful obedience to the gospel. God’s gospel is a “gospel of peace” (Rom. 10:15). This is what the Christian soldier has—his “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15).

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). We cannot have peace with God without justification, that is the forgiveness of our sins. “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23), and sin separates God and man (Isa. 59:1-2). For there to be salvation, there must be a reconciliation with God, but before there can be reconciliation, there must be a propitiation. This is where the cross comes in. He made peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20). He came to bring light to those that sit in darkness and to guide their feet in the way of peace (Luke 1:79).

Paul, in the Roman letter, sums it up by saying:

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:24-26).

This brings the peace which surpasses all understanding. Peace with God comes only through Christ, and that is by obeying the gospel of peace. In another one of Paul’s captivity epistles, he writes:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and

preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh
(Eph. 2:13-17).

In these five verses, we learn that through our reconciliation with Christ (thus being “in Christ Jesus”) which comes through the blood He shed, that we have peace. Thus, Christ is our peace: our living peace. “For he is our peace.”

Christ is our bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-6). “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” We notice the seven ones:

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. one body | | 5. one faith |
| 2. one spirit | 4. one Lord | 6. one baptism |
| 3. one hope | | 7. one God |

Right in the middle, there is one Lord that holds everything together.

In Ephesians 2, Paul reveals that Christ “hath made both one.” There were two nations, a division between them. Jesus made two groups into one and removed that wall, that barrier which kept them apart. He put an end to the cause of enmity, the Law of Moses with its injunctions and ordinances. The hostility of the law, with all of its commandments, rules, and regulations, He put a stop to it that Christ might create in Himself one new man in place of the two. His design was to unite the two sections of humanity in Himself.

“So making peace” and thus Christ was producing or making peace. The whole purpose is to reconcile the two (Jew and Gentile) in one single body (the church). Is it any wonder that His kingdom, the church of Christ, is the kingdom of peace (Rom. 14:17). “Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace *be* with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen” (1 Pet. 5:14).

“Having slain the enmity thereby.” Jesus came and destroyed the feuding and the hostility that existed between them. Now since the church is the kingdom of peace and Jesus has destroyed the feuding, we should be at “peace one with another” (Mark 9:50), or be at “peace among yourselves” (1 The. 5:13). We should “live in peace” (2 Cor. 13:11). “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

Jesus came with the good news of peace. Jesus came with the gospel of peace. Jesus’ message is of peace to all men. Peace is made with God through Christ (Phi. 4:7), and it “passeth all understanding.”

PEACE WITH SELF

Christians are a people of peace. The way of the Lord is for his people to seek peace. “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it” (Psa. 34:14). The same exhortation is in the New Testament. “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” (1 Pet. 3:10-11). Jude sent a salutation to his readers, saying, “Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied” (Jude 2). The fact is that we must live in peace, make peace, seek peace, that we might be at peace with brethren. This peace comes from God when one follows God’s plan for spiritual and mental health. It “passeth all understanding.” It passes the abilities of man’s intellectual striving for peace and surpasses every human thought or device as a means of insuring tranquility of mind. When the world looks upon the Christian’s peace, they do not understand it; for the peace God gives is not according to man’s thinking. Peace with self is that inner peace of contentment and satisfaction within the human mind. Through God’s plan, a spiritually-minded individual will possess life and peace. “For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). We are to let the God of peace rule in our minds (Col. 3:15).

This inner peace with self is an undisturbed, untroubled sense of well-being. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Christ urges that which would give the disciples untroubled hearts, that which is not disturbed by fearfulness. This peace is not that which the world can give to man; Jesus identifies it as *my peace*. That which belongs to God, which is found only in the Christ rather than the world. This is the teaching of Christ for Christians to live in peace (2 Cor. 13:11).

Peace has been made possible between men. However, it is necessary that evil-doers will be restrained in their conduct that peace may prevail in the land. The Christian is to be sure that he is a peace **maker**, not a peace **breaker**. Jesus said, “Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Mat. 5:9). We need to be peace makers to make possible peace between man and man. The Christian is one that promotes unity and harmony. He does not make war: he seeks to resolve it. Peace is the relief from war and what we

need for a rich and fully satisfying life. However, the New Testament is called the Gospel of peace (Rom. 10:16; Eph. 6:15), because its message generates harmony and peace among men. We are to live in peace with those in the world. This is, of course, to be the case as much as people will allow. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). We are to “follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). We are to pray for kings, and for all that are in authority, “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:2).

The world, many times, will not let the Christian have peace. Jesus said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The Christian knows that even though this world brings much turmoil, we can still have the peace that the Prince of peace offers. We understand that it will not be possible always to be at peace with all men. The Christian is to do his part to try to have peace. We must do good to all men, not returning evil for evil, but good for evil in word and in deed. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17—ASV).

The Lord’s church was prophesied in the Old Testament that it would be a kingdom of peace.

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isa. 2:4).

And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Mic. 4:3).

Members of the Lord’s church (in obeying the gospel of peace) are in a constant spiritual war (John 18:36). The battle is for the souls of men as we wage war against the devil.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:12-13).

However, “God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33). Is it any wonder that we should be at “peace one with another” (Mark 9:50), or be “at peace among yourselves” (1 The. 5:13). We, as Christians, should “live in peace” (2 Cor. 13:11). This is to be the attitude of all Christians. God’s people love peace. Let us always remember the importance of cultivating peace within the church, for it is a powerful evangelistic tool for the salvation of souls.

There is joy when Christian peace prevails among brethren. The spirit of peace should be the prayer and desire of every Christian. Most of the dangers that threaten congregational peace can be avoided when Christians develop the proper attitude of God first, our brother second, and ourselves third. We must endeavor to **keep** peace, not only to obtain it. You see, it is better to prepare and prevent, than to repair and repent.

CONCLUSION

Peace among Christians in the church is produced by the gospel. There is a blessing in being a peacemaker. Peace must be sown and peace must be made (Jam. 3:18).

We are to seek peace (1 Pet. 3:11). We cannot expect peace to find us. We must pursue it. “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it” (Psa. 34:14).

When we obtain peace, we must continue to follow it (Heb. 12:14). Paul told Timothy, “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22).

We “follow after the things which make for peace” (Rom. 14:19). There are certain attitudes and actions that have to be embraced to have this peace.

- We must pursue peace
- We must live in peace
- We must follow peace
- We must have peace with God
- We must have peace with Christ
- We must have peace with our brother
- We must have peace with ourselves
- Peace must be sought
- Peace must be made

- Peace must be sown
- Peace must be kept.

As a result of all that, we will have peace in our homes and the church. This peace “passeth all understanding.”

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“I CAN”

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

Gary W. Summers



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INTRODUCTION

In 1779 John Paul Jones, a native Scot, was captain of the *Bon Homme Richard* on behalf of the Continental navy when his ship engaged the English ship, the *Serapis*. The two vessels fought at short range. The British ship was on fire, but the *Bon Homme Richard* was sinking. The captain of the *Serapis* asked Jones if he would surrender. The famous captain shouted back, “Surrender? I have not yet begun to fight.” The battle raged for more than three hours; Jones and his men boarded the enemy ship and took command of it. They lost their ship but won the battle.

It is incredible how much has been accomplished by strong-willed determination. Many have been told they have lost the battle, their ship is sinking, and they need to surrender. The truly stout-hearted, however, refuse to be conquered. Winston Churchill inspired the world with his indomitable spirit during World War II. Later he made a short but powerful speech when he looked at the audience and said, “Never, never, never, never, never give up.” The human spirit, for all of its weaknesses and shortcomings, can sometimes soar with accomplishment. If we can do such magnificent things by our own power, imagine what could be accomplished with the power of God!

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phi. 4:13—NKJV). This short verse casts a long shadow. It provides both comfort and inspiration to all Christians. To obtain the maximum benefit from this verse and glean as much as we possibly can from it, we want to break it down into its five main parts and discuss each one of them.

“I”

In considering this verse, we will use the English word order to which we are accustomed, which is much less complicated than the Greek. According to Berry’s *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, this sentence taken literally reads: “All things - I am strong for - in - the - who empowers - me - Christ” (a dash appears between the translation of each Greek word). One other footnote on this verse is that there is a textual variation; many texts have *him* instead of *Christ*.

In the Greek, *I* is part of the verb; of course, *me* also refers to first person. We want to emphasize the *I* in this verse for several, somewhat related reasons. First, it is the individual who must take action. Our Lord will be given proper credit later on for His role in our lives, but here we want to notice the obligation of man. God has given us free choice; therefore, members of the church should not subscribe to fatalistic thinking. There is no place in the realm of accomplishment for sentiments such as, “Well, that is just the way it was meant to be.” O. Henry wrote a marvelous short story in support of that ideology (*Roads of Destiny*), and while some things occasionally seem to smack of fatalism, too many other things occur which contradict it.

Calvinism, which has God pulling our strings at will, is likewise foreign to the Scriptures. Although the ideology was not necessarily invented to provide an excuse for man’s sins, the result is nevertheless the same: we stand abrogated of all blame for our wrongdoing. Everything that happens is somehow part of God’s plan. We are merely players in the drama that God has written. What a ridiculous and unbiblical notion! We have choices.

We can choose to honor God in our lives or practice evil. We can choose to obey the gospel and be saved or harden our hearts to His loving call. We can choose, once we are Christians, to live by faith or shut Him out of our lives. We can choose to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly or allow it to have only a minimal amount of

influence in our lives. We can choose to stand firm amidst life's trials, or we can give up.

The *I* in Philippians 4:13 makes the difference. God will not force us to be faithful regardless of our own will. I must be the one to decide. This fact does not mean that God has no influence over us. Of course He desires that all men come to repentance and be saved from their sins (2 Pet. 3:9). He also experiences anguish over us and works providentially in our behalf so we will do what is right. But His will for our lives does not overpower us and take control, over our objections.

It is crucial to understand that the *I* of Philippians 4:13 makes the final decision. For this reason *I* cannot blame God for failure. *I* can also take a measure of credit for my achievements, my faithfulness, and my many labors. *I* cannot, however, take all of the credit, since heaven plays a major role in the success. But if *I* were due no credit, why should *I* be rewarded? This verse is perfectly balanced as it pertains to our relationship to God. God gives us the input we need to act properly. He encourages us to make responsible choices, but each individual decides for himself and is thus accountable for the course of action (or inaction) he pursues.

"CAN DO"

The Greek verb translated "can do" is rendered a number of ways in the 29 times it is found in the New Testament. Some of these follow: "is good" (Mat. 5:13), "that be whole" (Mat. 9:12), "that are whole" (Mark 2:17), "could" (Mark 5:4); "is able" (Luke 14:29), "prevailed" (Acts 19:20), "availeth" (Gal. 5:6), and "is of strength" (Heb. 9:17). In most of these is implied the ability to accomplish. The noun form of this verb is less varied. In the eleven times it occurs it is translated "strength," "power," and "might." The adjective also carries a distinctive meaning in its 27 appearances. Generally, it is rendered "strong" or "mighty."

There is a flavor of capability in the word. How refreshing in a world of "Well, I will try" to find someone who asserts "I can do." In these hesitant times people are more prone to offer excuses for failure (even in advance) rather than dedicating themselves to performance. Few are those who can accurately be described as "irresistible forces." Where are the men who have not yet begun to fight, who will never surrender, who are as confident as MacArthur when he vowed, "I will

return”? These men depended on their own human will; every aspect of their being concentrated on accomplishing a single purpose.

Why cannot Christians be as confident as those men were, or as the apostle Paul? Where does the spirit of timidity and fear of failure that characterizes so many brethren originate? The Lord “hath not given us the spirit of fear” (2 Tim. 1:7). How many men decline to lead a song or a prayer because they are afraid? How many refuse to teach Bible classes for the same reason? How many men otherwise qualified to be elders and deacons refuse to consider the work because they dread what might happen? As some one once quipped, “We need to be given a good swift kick in the seat of our can’ts.”

Congregations ought to be showing signs of life. Too many have battened down the hatches and are trying to hold on to what they have instead of sailing ahead to the next port. A baby grows and learns by stretching his limits and abilities. Sometimes he takes on more than he is ready to handle. Some *mature* Christians are content to maintain the status quo; they are reluctant to exercise faith and adopt the “can do” mentality. If an infant, after three years, was content to lay in his crib all day and had never learned how to walk, let alone crawl, we would know there was something wrong. Yet individual members and entire churches lie in their spiritual cribs, as listless as can be, and we think that is normal!

The church needs leaders with initiative. We have some; we need more. The church needs more men like those of Issachar, who “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chr. 12:32). How many congregations have developed effective evangelistic, educational, and benevolent programs? Some have the idea that coming to worship is **the** big sacrifice we make for the Lord. Other than that, the attitude is, “Do not infringe on my private life, do not expect me to interact with other members, and do not count on me for any extracurricular work” (such as visiting a sick member, cleaning someone’s house, or studying the Bible with someone). Such is the disposition of “I will not” rather than that of “I can do.”

The church needs leaders with determination and purpose, who will set the example and do the work—even if no one else follows. Setting the right example is important, and oftentimes brethren are inspired to participate when they see good results. “Enthusiasm is contagious,” some say. But leaders need to be planning and doing; many outstanding

ideas have been received on a warm hearth—only to freeze to death when the fire was left unattended. Leaders must *follow through* with the work whether or not others do what they committed themselves to do. Paul could easily have been discouraged by so many things that happened: his own hardships, the success of some of the false teachers, congregations that were not maturing as they should. Yet he maintained the attitude of "I can do."

The "can do" philosophy is not based on an overactive imagination which conceives of things nigh unto impossible; it is grounded in reality, leaving room for faith and the working of God. But strength and power and might inhere in the Greek word translated "can do," thus providing a realistic basis for commitment, determination, and force of will.

"ALL THINGS"

The Context

In the Greek word order, as presented earlier, this word comes first. The obvious contrast would be that Paul did not say, "I can do a few things" or even "some things." But before we get carried away like Paul's ship that was driven all over the Mediterranean, we should consider the context of the verse we are studying.

In Philippians 4:10-20 Paul is thanking the brethren for their monetary gifts. They had in the past sent unto him once and again (v. 16). In fact, no other church shared with him "concerning giving and receiving" except the one in Philippi (v. 15). For some reason they lacked the opportunity to help him for awhile, but they had recently resumed giving to him (v. 10). Apparently, he does not want them to feel bad for their lapse in supporting him; so he makes various comments to assure them that everything is all right.

Paul first comments that their generous giving was just as much a benefit to them as it was to him (v. 17). His second point is calculated to allay any guilt they might feel for having been unable to continue helping him. When he thanks them for helping again, he is not speaking solely with respect to his needs: "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content" (v. 11). This verse alone, if noted and applied by all members of the body of Christ, would be worth its weight in gold. In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, before his last attempt at winning the gold medal, Harold says to his friend, Aubrey, that he realized that Aubrey's great secret was contentment. "I'm 24 years old,

and I've never known it." Paul knew it. If the Philippians had not been able to send money to Paul, they need not worry; he was nevertheless content.

Paul knew that happiness did not depend on physical circumstances, but spiritual ones. For that reason he could sing and pray at midnight after being beaten and wrongfully imprisoned (Acts 16:25). He knew that man could only affect his body—not his soul (Mat. 10:28). He had endured much (2 Cor. 11:22-28), but he was content with his spiritual condition. Paul could from his own experience comment: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:6-8).

Paul, if he wrote Hebrews, affirms this truth once again (if he did not pen these words, it just shows further the harmony of the New Testament writers):

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6).

Truly, we know what he means from reading the other portions of Paul's life, such as when he writes, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phi. 4:12).

This is the context of the inspiring verse: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." The primary application is that Paul can endure suffering and hardship. Making this application can help each of us endure hardship, persecution, and physical suffering. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that we will not be tempted above what we can bear; Philippians 4:13 tells us that we can endure *abasement* and *suffering need*. God's grace will always be sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:9).

Christians are never promised life without mental or physical pain. We are not immune from severe persecution, torture, and death (as we observe from our brethren in the first century). But we have something that the world will never have—the power to endure all these things with grace, contentment, and dignity. "What shall we then say to these

things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? (Rom. 8:31). With Paul's knowledge and outlook we can all overcome:

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 (Rom. 8:38-39).

Applications—Local

Is it appropriate to apply what Paul says here more widely than the context indicates? In light of similar Scriptures and the two phrases that follow in Philippians 4:13, it is proper to give this verse a broader application. Consider, for example, Deuteronomy 31:23, in which God charges Joshua: "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee." Could not Joshua have in turn reported accurately pertaining to conquering the land: "I can do all things through God who strengthens me"? God told Joshua, "You shall do it."

Is there anything that we cannot accomplish—if it is God's will? Exactly what restrictions do we have? Joshua and Caleb rightly pronounced to a reluctant Israelite nation: "If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey" (Num. 14:8). Jonathan told his armor-bearer: "Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for *there is* no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6). David affirmed that he could do all things through God's power when he said: "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God" (1 Sam. 17:36). Speaking of the king of Assyria, King Hezekiah told his people: "With him *is* an arm of flesh; but with us *is* the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chr. 32:8a).

What former Pittsburgh Steeler running back, Rocky Bleier, said in a secular sense, is also true spiritually: "The only limitations we have are those we place upon ourselves." Mr. Bleier was qualified to make such a statement, since he was injured by shrapnel in the Viet Nam War and was told he would be lucky to ever walk again, let alone play football (and gain over 1,000 yards in a season). His desire caused him to work diligently for years to regain his physical health and stamina.

What can Christians accomplish on the local level, when they put their minds to it and depend on God to bless their efforts? First, they should be able to develop a dynamic evangelistic program. A number of excellent books with workable suggestions have been written in the past.¹ Many churches could make much more effective use of their time by studying this subject **and** applying the techniques demonstrated. Too often members are like those at one congregation with which this writer labored. When asked what topic or book of the Bible they would like to study, the majority of the members voted for evangelism. One, however, confided privately: “We have been taught how to do evangelism by the last three preachers. We don’t need to be **taught** it; we need to **do** it.”

Today we have the Jule Miller videotapes, which are far less cumbersome than taking the projector and screen with us to a Bible study, but far fewer studies are in progress now (despite the convenience) than in years past. A few congregations are working hard, but many have contented themselves with just maintaining the status quo. We ought to be looking on the fields that are white to harvest instead of making excuses why no one is interested (John 4:35). When we evangelize, we are engaged in the Lord’s work, and Jesus has promised to be with us (Mat. 28:18-20). If He fought for Israel to conquer the land, and was with Jonathan, David, and King Hezekiah, why are we not confident that He will keep His Word and be with us, also?

What is true of evangelism is true of education and benevolence. Our spiritual forefathers continued in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42), and they were taking care of the needs of numerous widows (Acts 6). Men with initiative need to make sure that these tasks are getting done. Too many are content to allow these areas of work to be assigned the lowest priority when the Lord ranked them highly. It is almost as if there is a cloud of spiritual lethargy that hangs over some congregations. If Sonshine does not break through, the cloud becomes a pall, a harbinger of having one’s candlestick removed.

Applications—Brotherhood Wide

We want to set forth three ideas that would require more effort than one congregation could do. These things are not meant to replace the work of the local congregation at all. Neither do they involve an unscriptural organization or superstructure, yet all congregations would benefit from them. Many other religious groups are outdistancing us

because they can act nationally whereas we cannot. We ought to consider the following strategies, which would give us more visibility and therefore open more doors for us.

(1) The first suggestion is to establish a national press or publishing house to make books available to the general public. Year after year our brethren publish lectureship books brimming with the best material available anywhere. Yet who sees any of it? In most cases between 1,000 and 2,000 copies are printed, most of which are purchased by preachers. We have books on Christian evidences, Bible translations, secular humanism, debates with atheists, and a host of topics that the general public would find interesting—if they were available in paperback at a reasonable price. What good is it to publish such quality material when it fails to reach those with whom it might do the most good?

Every religious denomination's books are available, but those that deal with pertinent topics from a biblical perspective are not. Liberals among us are gaining ground; they are getting their books into "Christian" bookstores, but we are not. If we are persuaded that such a thing is in harmony with the Lord's will, why can not we do *all things*? How could such a thing be accomplished? It could be done upon the same basis as *The Gospel Journal* was established—with a board of men who will never allow it to be taken over by unsound men.

(2) The same method could be used to find ways of promoting national advertising. If various cults can do it and call attention to themselves, so could the Lord's church. Surely, we have enough people with the background and the knack to produce some 30-second or one-minute commercials that would cause the nation to focus on the Lord's church.

(3) One complaint that is often heard among us is that we do not have enough sound educational material. Either the material is good and the visual aids lacking, or the visual aids are superb and the material suffers. Certainly, we have enough teachers and professionals (who also know the Scriptures) who could produce a quality curriculum.

Many other ideas could also be implemented if we would recapture the vision of who we are and what we **can do**. We enjoy a time and live in an age in which we are free from physical persecution in this



country. This privilege should be pressed to its greatest advantage. Just once, we could try going against the grain. Must it always be the case that the children of darkness are wiser than we are (Luke 16:8)? Years from now we can rejoice in telling—not all the reasons why it could not be done—but the way we did it!

“THROUGH CHRIST”

This chapter began with a look at what can be accomplished through the human will alone; examples could be multiplied. One of those encouraging notes that travels the e-mail route contains a list of seemingly impossible accomplishments.

Walt Davis was totally paralyzed by polio when he was nine years old, but he did not give up. He became the Olympic high jump champion in 1952.

Lou Gehrig was such a clumsy ball player that the boys in his neighborhood would not let him play on their team. But he was committed. He did not give up. Eventually, his name was entered into baseball's Hall of Fame.

Woodrow Wilson could not read until he was ten years old. But he was a committed person. He became the twenty-eighth President of the United States (Moore, e-mail).

The children of God should be known for their spiritual accomplishments since the God of heaven is with us. We stressed the “I” part earlier; now it is time to emphasize the source of our power. Notice the following passage's emphasis upon Divine help, which will be noted by bold lettering.

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as **I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee...**have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the **LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest** (Jos. 1:5, 9).

While it is true that Joshua needed to take action, it is also clear that he would succeed because he relied upon God. In other words, we accomplish God's purpose with God's power. The New Testament teaches that, if we abide in the vine, we should be able to bring forth much fruit; we ought to be very productive if we are abiding *in* Jesus, and without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). We never stand alone; there are two² of us—if we are walking in the light. Paul says that at his first defense before Caesar “all *men* forsook” him; then he adds: “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me” (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

On our own we could do some things, but we would never be able to do all things without Divine assistance, which involves trust on our part in the leading and providence of God. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Pro. 3:5-6). How simple it sounds; how difficult it is to practice. We cannot always discern what God is doing or what He is allowing to happen. Neither are we always confident of our role, but if we abide in Him and know that He abides in us, it is sufficient.

"WHO STRENGTHENS ME"

The above phrase is easy to comprehend so far as what it explicitly says: Christ is the one who strengthens His followers. Unfortunately, not everyone would be in agreement as to the **means** He causes us to be strengthened. Many would assume that our strength is accomplished through *subjective* means. When Paul said that the Lord stood by him in 2 Timothy 4:17 (cited earlier), for example, he adds the words *and strengthened me*. Some would erroneously conclude that Jesus did something internally to Paul—that He reached inside him and somehow made his heart more stout.

But how do we know that the strengthening in this verse did not result from Jesus speaking to Paul? The Lord spoke to him at the time of his conversion (Acts 9:4-6). On another occasion God sent an angel who "stood by" Paul and spoke words to him: "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (Acts 27:23-24). If an angel could cause Paul to be bold, how much more comfort could the Lord Himself provide for Paul? On yet another occasion, when Paul went to Corinth, he says he was with them "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). But the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee" (Acts 18:9-10). Certainly, there is ample precedent for Paul being strengthened through words and not a direct operation on his heart.

Many cite Ephesians 3:14-17 in an effort to prove that our strength is internal, yet the passage says only that we are "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." The Spirit inspired the words of the epistles that Paul wrote, and they do provide internal strength to us. Therefore, there is quite a difference between saying that God

strengthens us by means of His Word and saying that He does so directly—without the medium of words.

Martin Lloyd Jones, who often makes brilliant observations on the biblical text, takes the subjective approach to Philippians 4:13. In fact, he suggests that the verse would be more appropriately translated: “I am strong or made strong, for all things in the One who constantly infuses strength into me” (450). *Infuse*, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, means: “To put in or introduce into by or as if by pouring” (675). This word suggests a direct operation and a picture of the Lord holding a funnel to a spiritual intake valve: Every time we use up some strength, He pours some more into us. Jones makes other comments along these lines:

We can put our doctrine in this form. Paul is saying that Christ infuses so much strength and power into him that he is strong and able for all things. He is not left to himself, he is not struggling alone and vainly against these mighty odds. It is a great power from Christ himself which is entering, and has entered, into his life, and it is there as a dynamo, as an energy and strength. “In this,” says Paul, “I am able for anything” (454).

We do not believe a supernatural infusion of strength is implied in Philippians 4:13. Our strength comes from the promises of God, the assurances of Christ, our knowledge of the Truth, the brethren who encourage us, and reflection upon all the examples in the Word of God in which God has stood by His people. Upon these we can rely and stand firm.

CONCLUSION

Often we display the attitude that all the exciting things happened in the past. Okay, we will not witness the ten plagues Moses brought upon Egypt (through the power of God) or see the miracles of Christ in our day. But Christians living by faith can still generate enthusiasm in the church and inspire others. What could be more exciting than to see congregations of the Lord’s church grow and multiply (without division) and still retain their soundness! How thrilling would it be to see even dozens of sinners born again each year! What joy would it invoke to see schools of preaching expanding and budgets that included more evangelism overseas! These are not just dreams. We have the power to accomplish it! We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

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ENDNOTES

¹Ivan Stewart wrote two books: *From House to House* and *GO YE Means GO ME*. Homer Hailey authored *Let's Go Fishing For Men*. A. D. Wright penned *Workshoes for Christ Through Personal Evangelism*. Otis Gatewood wrote *You Can Do Personal Work*.

²D. Martin Lloyd Jones tells a story of an old preacher who cannot understand Paul saying, "I can do all things," until he adds the words through Christ, whereupon he acknowledges, "I did not know there were two of you."

“GOD SHALL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEED” PHILIPPIANS 4:19

Monte Evans



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INTRODUCTION

Within the pages of inspiration, there are countless Scriptures that depict the compassion, mercy, kindness, gentleness, power, greatness, and desires of God the Father. Many Scriptures rebuke, chasten, reprove, motivate, inspire, guide, exhort, warn, and comfort. Some passages cause us to shed tears of sorrow and others tears of jubilation. Other Scriptures pierce the soul and cause the honest heart to change for the better and mature spiritually. Many Scriptures instill in the heart of man hope, reward, and a sincere longing for the life beyond the shroud of death. Still other verses edify, give promise, exalt, humble, and bring tranquillity. The focus of this gathering is to bring to our attention Scriptures in God’s Word that bring encouragement.

As members of the Lord’s church, we know that our sins have been cleansed by Christ’s precious blood and, if faithful unto death, we have the hope of Heaven when this life is no more. Yet, while we rejoice in the grace of God, at times it is necessary that we be encouraged by family, brethren, and by Inspiration.

As we are engaged in the continuing war against the Devil and his allies, we often are wounded during the battle. Faithful elders,

preachers, Bible class teachers, and members who are on the front lines of battle are the recipients of the scars of war. There are no Purple Hearts to be awarded, no Medals of Honor to hang on the breast, no Distinguished Crosses to be displayed, yet we continue with the good fight of the faith. The greatest comfort soldiers of the cross receive are the words of encouragement that come from the Captain of our salvation. The true soldier is never to tire, surrender, compromise, retreat, or commit treason. Sometimes we may well feel as did Elijah:

I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left (1 Kin. 19:10).

Only the Word of God can bring the comfort needed when we feel the Elijah syndrome coming upon us. God's Word informs us that we have Him as our strength and power, that we will be victorious, and that we are never alone (Rom. 8:31). As we continue our study, let us focus on one particular Scripture that brings encouragement to the child of God.

PAUL'S WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE PHILIPPIANS

As we read and study the letter penned by the apostle Paul to the beloved brethren at Philippi, we recognize it as a letter of thanksgiving (Phi. 1:3). It is a letter that encourages these brethren to have a love that abounds toward deeper knowledge and a sharper judgment (Phi. 1:9). It is a letter that is filled with love, concern, and exhortation to remain faithful and true to the faith (Phi. 1:27). What is remarkable and noteworthy of this letter is that these words of thanksgiving, appreciation, love, and continued faithfulness are written as this stalwart proclaimer of Truth is incarcerated in the imperial city of Rome. Paul was unsure of his fate, yet he was able to encourage the brethren of Philippi and brethren of today with words of hope, peace, and promise. Please notice the promise and the encouraging words which are the topic of our discussion: "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phi. 4:19). As we study these words of encouragement, it will do us well to give serious attention to what the apostle Paul means by his words.

The apostle Paul refers to God the Father as "my God," thus denoting a relationship. Paul is not suggesting that he owns God, but that he claims God as his God. Many a person could not or would not make such a pronouncement simply because worldliness and covetous-

ness is their god of choice. Paul recognized Jehovah God as his God and God the Father recognized Paul as a son (Gal. 4:6). There was indeed a blood covenant relationship of which Paul was eternally grateful, made possible by the blood of Jesus the Christ. Paul states that his God “shall supply all your need.” *Shall (mello)* is defined by Thayer as “in general, of what is sure to happen” (397). Another word to use in the place of *shall* would be *will*. Both of these words are words that are not conditional. Paul clearly states that his God shall/will do something for the brethren at Philippi. But what?

Paul states that God will supply. *Supply (pleroo)* is defined as “to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally with what is necessary for subsistence” (Thayer, 517). Paul uses a derivative of the same word to describe how he has been well supplied for by the Philippian brethren in verse 18 of the same chapter. *Need (chreia)* is defined as “the condition of one deprived of those things which he is scarcely able to do without, want, need” (Thayer, 671). It is indeed encouraging to know that God will take care of our needs. There is a difference in being found wanting and wanting material possessions. God will take care of those things that we must have to survive both physically and spiritually. Thus, members of the Lord’s church are promised the blessings of God by Christ Jesus.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The apostle Paul clearly states that God will supply the needs of those in Philippi. As we read this letter, we must first notice to whom it is addressed. The letter is not addressed to the general populace of Philippi. The letter is addressed to brothers and sisters in Christ. The key word in the previous sentence is *in*. As we study our New Testament, we learn of the benefits of being in Christ. In Christ we have: redemption (Rom. 3:24), one body (Rom. 12:5), approval (Rom. 16:10), liberty (Gal. 2:4), sanctification (1 Cor. 1:2), faith and love (2 Tim. 1:13), and hope (1 Cor. 15:19). Paul sums it up by saying that we have all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). One cannot over-emphasize the importance of being in Christ. Being in Christ places us in the fold of safety, the church. If one is not in Christ, one will not find his eternal destination to be the heavenly abode. Our very souls depend on whether or not we are in Christ or out of Christ.

A relationship with God is achieved by complying with His Will, thus obeying the Gospel of Christ. Man becomes a child of God by the

faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26). As one is immersed for the remission of sins, one is baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27), thus becoming a baptized believer, a member of the Lord's church, a brother or sister in Christ. The only way that a proper relationship is attained with God is when one is in Christ. The only way that one is placed in Christ is through New Testament water baptism (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Only when one is in a relationship with God does one qualify to have one's needs taken care of by God. God the Father takes care of the needs of the wicked by means of general providence and takes care of the needs of His children by means of specific providence. This will be discussed briefly in another section.

THE NEEDS OF PHILIPPIANS 4:19

We, as Christians, are guaranteed by the Word of God that our Heavenly Father will supply all our needs. This is something that we do not need to hope for, wish for, or contemplate how to purchase. It is encouraging to know that God is willing to supply our needs to make us complete emotionally, spiritually, and physically in this life. As we read Philippians 4, we can see how God takes care of our needs.

Mental or Emotional Needs

We Need to Rejoice

Emotionally God takes care of us. Paul writes in Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice." Rejoicing is something which Paul wants us to do. We are to be filled with joy, to have great delight or be gladdened. Never should a Christian walk about as though he/she has nothing for which to be happy or grateful. However, this rejoicing is only found within a specific sphere: In the Lord. True joy is found only in Jesus our Redeemer. Those who have no reason to rejoice are those who are not in the Lord. There is no reason to feel joy or great delight if one is not in Christ. We, as members of Christ's body, rejoice because of the salvation He provides (Acts 8:38-39). We rejoice in the fact that Christ died for sinners (Rom. 5:8). We are happy because we have been cleansed of our sins by His precious blood (Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). We rejoice in the fellowship He provides and the hope He gives (1 John 1:3, 7; Rom. 12:12). As members of His glorious body, we rejoice because our names are written in Heaven (Luke 10:17-20; Rev. 21:7).

Paul tells us to rejoice, and we can understand why we are to rejoice. However, notice the duration of our rejoicing. Our rejoicing is perpetual, it is to be *alway*. It does not matter what befalls us, we are to rejoice. Paul rejoiced while he was incarcerated in a Philippian prison (Acts 16:25) and in a Roman prison (Phi. 4:10). What did Paul have to be joyful about? Paul rejoiced for the same reasons we are to rejoice today.

Our rejoicing or being filled with joy is of necessity to worship God properly. The apostle John informs the Bible student that there is such a thing as a true worshiper and true worship. So, in the eyes of God, there must also exist a false worshiper and false worship. Our Savior states this regarding our worship:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

God desires men and women to worship Him according to His prescribed design: in spirit (attitude) and in truth (doctrine). The absence of one or both violates His Will. If a brother or sister is filled with bitterness, discontent, hate, malice, or is not joyful when in the process of worship, they become false worshipers who are guilty of false worship. False worship is neither acceptable to God the Father nor is it pleasing.

Our rejoicing will help us emotionally. When one rejoices, personal strife vanishes. When members of the church rejoice, fussing, feuding, murmuring, and whining is replaced with the sounds of joy and cheer. When rejoicing is the rule, it affects us personally. Those who are rejoicing become more attractive outwardly. What is more attractive, a person who possesses a permanent scowl, a face filled with displeasure, a face frozen with a frown, or a face filled with happiness, joy, and delight? Our willingness to be joyful and to rejoice will have an effect on the Lord's church. We will have more influence with others, we will be able to attract more people for the cause of Christ and probably live longer and be more productive in the Kingdom.

We Need Not to Worry

Another way that God takes care of us emotionally is in Philippians 4:6. Paul says, "Be careful for nothing," or be anxious for nothing. Paul wants us to be worry free. Worry causes physical problems such as

ulcers, stomach maladies, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Man can literally become physically ill because of worry. Our risen Savior tells us “Which of you by taking thought [being anxious—ASV] can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Mat. 6:27). Worry, according to Jesus, does us absolutely no good. Worry or anxiety can affect us mentally. It can cause us to become distracted and lose our focus on spiritual matters. Worry or anxiety can easily move into a more serious problem such as depression. Depression robs us of desire and energy. Can we be happy and joyful while in a depressed state? Can we be an effective worker for the Lord while suffering from depression? Will our light shine if we cover it with the cloak of depression? Sometimes we become bewildered, overwhelmed, or maybe a little down because of Satan’s antics. Thank the Lord that He is there for us to supply all our needs.

We Need Peace

When we are worry free, we have peace. The peace of God passes all understanding (Phi. 4:7). The peace that we experience as God’s children is not easily understood by the masses. It is not the kind of peace that comes by the lack of confrontation. We are not to be at peace in that regard, simply because we are at war against Satan and his forces. It is true that the apostle Paul teaches us to live peaceably with all men, if it is possible (Rom. 12:18). Paul is not teaching us to compromise Truth or to avoid the defense of the Gospel of Christ, as many of our brethren now involve themselves. This peace (freedom from anxiety) is something that many do not possess and cannot comprehend. This peace will keep or guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. The song written by Cleland B. McAfee entitled *Near to the Heart of God* states: “There is a place of full release, Near to the heart of God, A place where all is joy and peace, Near to the heart of God.” Man needs peace. When man draws nigh to God, God will draw nigh to him (Jam. 4:8) and peace is awarded. Here we find another one of our needs being supplied by the power of God. We need peace, perfect peace.

We Need Hope

Possessing the hope of eternal life beyond this life causes us to live a Christ-like life. Man needs hope. Again, God supplies all our needs. When man has no hope, man lives with expectation of nothing.

Without hope man lives in drudgery, depression, despair, and darkness. Our hope is built on Jesus Christ. Because of Christ, and His selfless sacrifice, we have hope of heaven as our eternal home when this life is complete. Because of His power over death, we have hope of the resurrection. If we do not have hope of the resurrection, we are most miserable (1 Cor. 15:12-19). The apostle Paul writes to the brethren in Rome regarding hope, “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*” (Rom. 8:24-25).

Many hope for a better life in this world: Better paying jobs, longer paid vacations, great incentive packages, prosperity, 401K plans, and freedom from the bondage of debt. When man’s hope reaches no further than the carnal, there is a great void in the hope of man. Our hope must be seen, and the Scriptures teach us that our hope can be seen by others: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). Hope is something that man needs and is sometimes all that man has upon which to cling. Those in Christ have hope of the resurrection.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

We need this type of hope, for it makes us pure. Again, God will supply all our needs.

We Need to Be Loved

As human beings, we have several traits or characteristics that dwell within our being. One such trait is a sense of “ought.” For example, if by chance we pass by a burning building and hear a cry for help and witness a person attempting an escape, we are compelled to render some type of aid. We know that we ought to give assistance somehow, someway. Sometimes people are placed in the attention of a nation by displaying courageous acts without themselves being courageous. They simply responded to the aid of another who desperately needed help. Another trait in man is the desire to worship. Since the beginning, man has displayed the desire to worship a form of deity (Something or Someone greater than himself). Man has worshiped various types of

gods. Inanimate objects to living creatures have been the objects of worship through the centuries. Another trait of man (some people will never admit to this) is the need to be loved. Man typically desires to be loved by someone or something. Love is the most tender of all human emotions. There are numerous facets of love and numerous definitions. For example, the love a man has for his wife is a different type of love than he has for his children. The love that one has for a parent is different than the love for a dear and close friend. Many confuse love with lust, while others confuse love with pity. It has been said that “love makes the world go round.” This statement might well be true, since the God of love, our heavenly Father, created the world and designed the universe and all its laws.

Being a part of a loving family (an environment filled with love) produces loving family members. If love for one another and love for God is not the nucleus of the family, destruction is inevitable. Love is vital to our existence. Without love man feels unworthy, worthless, and useless. We must possess the highest level of confidence in the fact that man is loved. We teach our children the songs: *Jesus Loves the Little Children* and *Jesus Loves Me* to instill in them the love of God and Jesus so they can recognize their worth. We, as human beings, need to know that there is One who loves all of mankind. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). When we feel unloved and unwanted, we must find comfort in the realization that we are loved by the One who originated love—God the Father. The great love of God was manifested in the sending of His dear Son. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son in to the world, that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9). God the Father displayed His love for us by the sending of the Christ, to bring forth God’s message detailing His plan for man to inherit heaven as our eternal home. The love of God is seen in the Scriptures, teaching us that He does not want any to perish, desires man to repent, desires man to be saved, and desires man to come to the knowledge of the Truth (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). God manifests His love for us by creating us in His image (Gen. 1:26-27) and making us free moral agents, having the ability to make our own choices. Yes, God the Father loves us, and it is an encouragement to have this information.

Spiritual Needs or Blessings

We Need Protection

As we continue our study of the needs that God supplies to those who are in Christ, we find it encouraging that our spiritual needs will be supplied also. We need protection from the Tempter. God, who will not leave us unprotected and defenseless against the wiles of Satan, has provided for us a means of protection. God has always provided protection for His people (consider the times when God allowed His people to be taken captive because of disobedience—cf., Judges). In the book of Daniel, God provided protection for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego while in the fiery furnace:

And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them (Dan. 3:27).

These three faithful men of God refused to worship the golden image they were commanded to worship by the decree of King Nebuchadnezzar. God gave them protection. Daniel received the protection of God while cast into the lion's den:

Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: *and* the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt (Dan. 6:19-22).

The reason Daniel received the protection of God is clearly recognized in verse 20. Daniel continually served God.

In Acts, the apostle Paul received words of promise regarding protection from the enemies of the cross. While proclaiming the Gospel of Christ in Corinth, the Jews opposed themselves and blasphemed; thus, Paul went unto the Gentiles. Paul was no doubt afraid and discouraged because of what had transpired. However, Paul received these words of comfort, encouragement, and protection: "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

This revelation from the Savior was a strength, a comfort, and an encouragement to this proclaimer of Truth—as well it should have been!

God the Father will take care of us today. If we do not believe that God will take care of us, we ought not sing the song written by Civilla D. Martin: *God Will Take Care of You*. Remember that wonderful chorus: “God will take care of you, Thro’ every day, O’er all the way; He will take care of you, God will take care of you.” The protection that is promised is real and ready at our disposal. The question is: “What type of protection is provided?” Will God miraculously cause the Laws of nature (gravity) to cease to keep us from falling to the ground? Of course not. However, it is encouraging to know that God does provide for us the protection from our adversary the Devil. We are in a spiritual war with the prince of this world. The apostle Paul states, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*” (Eph. 6:12). To survive this spiritual war, we must array ourselves in the proper battle attire which God provides for us. Paul tells us that we are to take unto ourselves the whole armor of God. Why, Paul? Ephesians 6:13 answers the question: “That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” We are to array ourselves with: our loins gird about with the Truth, and the breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:14), the preparation of the Gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15), the shield of faith (Eph. 6:16), the helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). God the Father in His love and mercy has seen to it that we, His children, not only have the proper equipment to battle with Satan, we also have the proper battle strategy (His Word) which is guaranteed to bring victory to the faithful. Our heavenly Father is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9); thus He has provided protection from Satan for all those who desire this promise of safety. We need protection from Satan. It is encouraging to know that God the Father supplies our need.

We Need Courage

As we strive daily to do the Lord’s Will, striking blows for the cause of Christ, and waging war against Satan and his allies, it is both a blessing and encouragement to know that God bequeaths to us courage. Paul writes to his son in the faith, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”

(2 Tim. 1:7). We are given the ability to overcome our fears of confrontation and battle with wickedness through God. We need this courage to take on the forces that, if unchecked, will bring destruction to the faith and to the Way. Far too many soldiers of the cross are lacking courage. Far too many brothers and sisters are attending congregations where the whole counsel of God is not being proclaimed or is being compromised or perverted. Not wanting to cause a stir or be viewed as trouble-makers they sit idly by watching the Lord's church slip further away from the Old Jerusalem Gospel. Soldiers of the cross are to be brave and courageous. In Joshua 1:9 God speaks to Joshua these words: "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God *is* with thee whithersoever thou goest." To live the Christian life one must be courageous. It takes courage to speak out against unrighteousness and wickedness. It takes courage to speak out against the sin of homosexuality and lesbianism. It takes courage to walk away from evil and its influence. It takes courage to stand against peer pressure at any age. It takes courage to live a godly life in opposition to a worldly life. To possess good morals, Christian values, and wholesome ethics takes courage which many do not possess. To be sanctified by the blood of Christ and recognize Him as Savior takes courage. To know that others may think that Christian's are weird, strange, silly, or unmanly takes courage. To stand for the Truth exhibits courage. To proclaim Truth to friends and family exhibits courage. To correct someone of religious error exhibits courage. To defend the faith, the church, and our Savior exhibits courage. To deny oneself the pleasures of this world and focus on those things which are above exhibits courage. The great prophet of God, Isaiah, stated these words regarding strength and power:

He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint (Isa. 40:29-31).

Our courage and our strength is found in Christ Jesus (Phi. 4:13). We are to be strong and be of good courage. It is encouraging to know that our strength and our courage is given to us by God. Without God, we could not stand alone to face this life and the wiles of Satan. If we are to survive this continual spiritual battle, we must gather the strength

which God supplies. We must look to Him for strength and courage, and it will be given to us.

We Need Fellowship

Another spiritual need that is a must for every child of God is fellowship with God and His dear Son. For fellowship to take place between man and God, a prerequisite must be met: man must be in Christ and walk in the light. John, the apostle of love, writes:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

Walking in the light (a manner of life obedient to God's teachings) brings with it fellowship with God and with other faithful brethren. With the absence of fellowship we could not function properly as a child of God. We would be on our own and unable to stand. We need the fellowship with God and His dear Son. We need the fellowship of faithful servants. This fellowship with others is edifying, promotes comradery, helps us to instill courage in one another, and encourages us to keep fighting the good fight of faith. We need fellowship. It is encouraging to know that our heavenly Father provides for our need.

We Need the Forgiveness of Sins

As we labor in the Kingdom of the Lord on a daily basis, we grow in our appreciation for God's great plan of salvation, the perfect Plan. We are encouraged by the boundless love God has for His children in that, while we have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine (the Gospel of Christ), we were cleansed of our past sins through baptism. We are further encouraged by the love of God in that after we have been immersed for the forgiveness of our past sins, there is the forgiveness of sins committed after baptism. We often refer to this cleansing of sins as the "Second Law of Pardon." God, in His infinite wisdom, knew man would be tempted by Satan, yield to that temptation, and sin. If we say that we do not sin or have not sinned, we make God a liar and His Word does not dwell in us (1 John 1:10). When we do sin, we separate ourselves from Him, no longer able to enjoy fellowship with Him (Isa. 59:1-2). In 1 John 1:9, we learn: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to

cleans us from all unrighteousness.” The promise of God is this: if we confess our sins (acknowledge or admit our sins with the view to repent), God is faithful to forgive us our sins. This forgiveness of sins is awarded through the avenue of prayer (Acts 8:22). This forgiveness of sins is contingent on us walking in the light (1 John 1:7). This forgiveness of sins restores our fellowship with God which cannot be restored by any other means. It is indeed encouraging to know that there is the forgiveness of sins when we miss the mark and fall short of the glory of God.

We Need Guidance

The wisest of the wise wrote, “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death” (Pro. 16:25). The way that seems right to man is not always the way to travel. Jesus makes it clear that many will choose to travel through the wide gate of destruction (Mat. 7:13-14). This route seems right to man; however it will cost man his eternal soul. Jeremiah writes, “O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). According to inspiration, man cannot direct his own steps. True guidance is needed. True guidance is supplied by God. We must put our trust in God and in His infallible Word to be assured that He will guide us home to heaven.

Not only are we to place our trust in God and His Word, we must respect and love His Word. Notice what the Psalmist pens regarding the Word of God: “O how love I thy law! *it is* my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97). Again the Psalmist writes, “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; *and* I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:127-128). Anything that contradicts the Word of God is a false way. Regarding God’s Word as our guide the Psalmist writes, “Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). Through God’s Word, we receive understanding: “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:104). We can know and understand the Truth, God’s Word (John 8:32; Eph.5:17).

The denominational world is the greatest example of men who are trying to direct their own steps and the steps of others by doctrines which seem right to man. Yet these doctrines are an abomination before God because they are foreign to God’s Word. Man, in general,

believes he can create a better plan of salvation than the omniscient Creator. God sent His Son to be our way (John 14:6). God gave us His Word through Christ Jesus, which will be the standard of judgment in the great and final day (John 12:48-50).

We need guidance to keep ourselves pure as we live in this sinful world. The Word of God teaches us to purify our souls by obeying the Truth (1 Pet. 1:22). We need guidance in how to please our heavenly Father. In John 8:28-29, we learn how we are to please God. Jesus is recorded as saying, “And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” We please our heavenly Father by living an obedient life imitating the life Christ our Savior lived. We need guidance to direct us as how to rear our children (Eph. 6:4). We need guidance so husband and wife may live according to God’s eternal plan (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-33). We need guidance in every aspect in our Christian walk (2 Pet. 1:3). We need guidance because our thoughts differ from the thoughts of God (Isa. 55:8). What an encouragement to know that God has indeed supplied guidance for man through His infallible, inerrant, plenary, verbally inspired Word.

We Need to Communicate with God

As we live in this old world below, we are bombarded with worldly stimuli. We deal with people who sometimes disappoint, hurt, despise, ridicule, and disgust us. We, at times become inundated with problems that life brings our way. We are sometimes pulled in every direction at the same time creating a stressful environment. We need to talk to someone who cares for us, who loves us, who can help us, and will help us. The avenue of prayer, the ability to speak to God through Christ Jesus, is a much-needed blessing. The blessing of prayer is one of those spiritual blessings awarded only to those who are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). We need to to speak to our heavenly Father—to be in communication with Him. We, as His children, are directed to pray without ceasing (1 The. 5:17). To pray without ceasing is to pray constantly, habitually, and regularly. The true child of God will live a prayerful life.

According to James 5:16, prayer avails much in its working. Our prayers must be according to His divine Will and addressed to God the Father (1 John 5:14; Luke 11:1-4). Our prayer lives are important to our Christianity. We need to ask for God’s forgiveness when we fail

Him. We need extend our thanksgivings to Him as He so richly blesses us. We need to pray for the opportunity to teach others the saving Gospel of Christ. We need to pray for strength, courage, and wisdom. We must be forever thankful to God for recognizing our need to speak to Him. The avenue of prayer is certainly a blessing and an encouragement to every child of God.

We Need The Assurance of God's Presence

As a young boy, I was blessed to have two loving, kind, and wonderful parents. Both my father and my mother took care of the needs of my sister and me. We never went without food, clothing, love, encouragement, or comforting words. We lived in a safe environment, a safe neighborhood, and were able to attend, for the most part, safe schools. At night when I would pillow my head to sleep, I would sometimes become frightened of things outside. I knew that I was not alone in the house. My sister and my parents were sleeping soundly in their rooms, and I would be safe because of their presence. Yet, sometimes that knowledge did not bring me the assurance that I needed. So to have the assurance of their presence, I would take quilt and pillow in hand and make my journey toward my parents' room. In stealth-like fashion I would creep into their room and snugly and safely sleep on the floor at the foot of their bed. Sometimes it was enough to rid my fears by sleeping in the hallway with my pillow just inside their doorway. The assurance of their presence cast away my fears and doubts.

As Christians we sometimes become fearful and filled with doubts. We need to have the assurance that God is always nigh. Our God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (always present, everywhere). The promise of the constant presence of Deity is given to us by our Lord and Savior. Jesus states, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world" (Mat. 28:20). The Psalmist writes, "Thou *art* near, O LORD; and all thy commandments *are* truth" (Psa. 119:151). We need the assurance that God is always present. We do not have to move down a hallway to be closer to Him. It is encouraging to know that He is always nigh.

PHYSICAL NEEDS

Paul desires his beloved brethren at Philippi to fully understand that they are truly blessed because of the relationship they sustain with God

the Father and with His dear Son. These are truly words that bring soldiers of the cross encouragement. The point must be made that in Philippians 4:19 Paul did not state that God would supply all of our wants. There is a great difference between our wants and our needs. On the day of Pentecost following the ascension of Christ, there were those who because of their obedience the Gospel of Christ were left destitute, with no place to call home. "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45). Those who were without received of what they had need. Not what they desired. No doubt each of us at one time in our lives has confused our wants with our needs. We are to be careful not to have blurred vision when wants and needs are contemplated and prayed for to our Heavenly Father. Too many of God's children have become nearsighted in this respect. Some feel it of necessity to drive a late model automobile at all times. Some lose themselves in fashion and the ritzy lifestyle. Recreational vehicles (boats, jet skis, all terrain vehicles, etc.) become a need and not a luxury. Great and exquisite homes are sought after and demanded. Unfortunately, some brethren feel if they do not receive their high-dollar wants, God did not fulfill His promise. Let us discuss our needs described in the Word of God.

Our Savior, while giving the "Sermon on the Mount," speaks of God's care and protection of His people. Therein we learn of the providence of God. In the Old Testament, through the providence of God, He took care of Israel during the years of wandering. For some forty years, God provided Israel with manna (Exo. 16:35). They received water to drink and flesh (quail) to eat (Num. 11:31). God's providential care brought Elijah bread in the morning and flesh in the evening delivered by ravens (1 Kin. 17:6). Yes, God will take care of His children. There are two facets of God's providence: general providence, and specific (or special) providence.

Let us first examine the general providence of God. In the sphere of God's general providence, He provides for both the sinner and the saint. Jesus states:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (Mat. 5:44-45).

Both the just and the unjust receive the blessings of God's providence. Both the just and the unjust can witness and admire the beauty of all of God's creations. God, through His providence, provides food for the animal kingdom, the beasts of the field, and the birds that fly in the heavens (Psa. 147:9;104:21; Mat. 6:26).

We can see how God's general providence provides for His creation. Let us examine God's specific or special providence. God the Father knows our needs, and He will provide accordingly. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus makes it clear that we are not able to serve two masters: God and mammon. A choice is to be made of whom we will serve. We are to serve only one Master: God the Father. In so doing, Christ says:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? (Mat. 6:25).

Therefore which begins verse 25, is quite significant. Brother Garland Elkins states the significance of this word. *Therefore* "is a word following a series of statements which cannot be contradicted and which introduce an inevitable conclusion" (27). Jesus wants His hearers to understand the benefits of serving God and placing their full trust in heavenly riches opposed to the riches of this world:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things (Mat. 6:25-32).

Our Savior desires us to know that God the Father will take care of us. Jesus makes it clear that God will take care of the birds by making sure that they are fed. He continues to tell us that God will clothe the grass and flowers in such a beautiful way that King Solomon could not compare to their splendor even with all his riches. Jesus wants us to be minus

anxiety or worry (just as the apostle Paul tells us to be without worry) regarding the things to sustain life. To manifest anxiety or worry would violate His command to be worry free. To be anxious for food and raiment is unbecoming character for a child of God. Jesus in not commanding us to be careless, lackadaisical, or unconcerned regarding our welfare. Jesus wants us to trust in God knowing that He will take care of us. We sometimes sing: "All you may need He will provide, God will take care of you; Nothing you ask will be denied, God will take care of you." These words encourage us to know that God, the Benevolent One, will take care of us.

The key verse of this lesson on specific providence is located in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Our worry free or anxiety free life is predicated on this verse. There is something that separates us from the unjust which receive the general providence of God. This one thing is the desire to seek God. Our priorities must be in the proper order. We, as His creation, must have the wisdom and the energy to seek God. In seeking God, one finds the church for which Christ gave His life. When we seek God and His righteousness, God will provide us our needs for this life and for our eternal welfare. God does not promise to give us wealth, fame, prestige, or popularity. Certainly, we recognize that there are those who do not seek God, yet they possess wealth, prestige, and other such things. However, they do not have the security that His faithful have in knowing God promises to give us those things necessary to live: to sustain life. Since we know that God will take care of His children, to worry is unnecessary and a waste of time. The time that many waste worrying, can well be spent working in the kingdom of the Lord. Only those who are in Christ receive such blessings and encouragement.

It is encouraging to know that as God's children He will supply all our need. Philippians 4:19 does not in anyway teach, hint, or insinuate that the child of God is not to work for his livelihood. A slothful child of God is an abomination in the eyes of God. Those who will not work are not worthy of receiving food (2 The. 3:10). Becoming a human sponge to absorb things that ought to be earned by gainful employment is behavior unbecoming of a Christian. We, as New Testament Christians, are to be the light of the world, influencing the world for

righteousness (Mat. 5:13-16). Husbands are to work and provide for the family; not to do so is detrimental to the soul (1 Tim. 5:8).

CONCLUSION

It is indeed encouraging to know that the Merciful God of heaven is concerned about our physical, mental, and spiritual needs. No one else could take charge of these needs and fulfill them as our loving Father. When we make our petitions known to our heavenly Father, words of thanksgiving ought to humbly, graciously, and lovingly part from our lips to the throne of God. Just to know that we, as God's children, are so blessed and so well taken care of, is reason to rejoice, praise God, and live faithful lives for Him.

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phi. 4:19).

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THE CHRISTIAN'S REWARD

2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

Ronnie Hayes



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INTRODUCTION

This year's theme of *Encouraging Statements of the Bible* will be a great complement for last year's theme of *Sad Statements of the Bible*. This writer counts it a joy to have the opportunity to study "The Christian's Reward." Christ informs His disciples of a heavenly reward available unto them.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:1-6).

If anyone is lost, it will be because of his unwillingness to follow Christ, not because of some deficiencies in God's plan of salvation. God, through His love and mercy, has made available to man His plan of salvation (Tit. 2:11-12). It will be up to man to choose whether or not he is willing to submit his will to God's will. Most individuals, who believe in anything, believe in a reward for those who are God's faithful children. In 2 Timothy 4:6-8 Paul states:

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

This subject will be approached from three points: first, the importance of being “**ready**”; second, the “**reason**” why one will enjoy the reward; then third, the “**reward**” as Christians will be blessed with it. May this study create in us a desire to do whatever it takes to inherit that heavenly reward which our father makes available to “all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

ARE YOU READY?

Paul states that he is ready! One has to be prepared for the Christian life (Phi. 1:21-24) and for the death that all face (Heb. 9:27). Albert Barnes states:

The idea of the apostle then is, that he was in the condition of the victim on whose head the wine and oil had been already poured, and which was just about to be put to death; that is, he was about to die. Every preparation had been made, and he only awaited the blow which was to strike him down (246).

One has only to open the holy writ to see the necessity of preparation. Amos, in reproving Israel, said, “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: *and* because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (Amos 4:12). Isaiah tells Hezekiah, “Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kin. 20:1). All have to face reality. Each of us is moving toward eternity and the only thing that anyone can do is be prepared. Many worry themselves about the second coming of Christ. They seek for “end time signs” or seek to predict His coming, when really all they need to do is to be prepared. Christ stated:

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh (Mat. 24:42-44).

One cannot predict or prevent the second coming of Christ, but one can be ready. If one is unready, how tragic it would be to find out too late. Paul has the assurance, which comes only from the obedience of the Gospel. How sad judgment will be when those who have not obeyed the gospel, hear those words: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into

everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41). Truly, heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Sadly, hell is a prepared place for a prepared people as well. All are preparing to spend an eternity somewhere.

One's preparation has to involve his obedience to the gospel, his daily life, and his determination to overcome his adversary. It is one's obedience which puts him into Christ, making him a child of God and heir according to the promises (Rom. 8:17). Each must determine if he is going to make preparations in obedience to the gospel. In determining if one has made his preparation, one might wonder: “What is involved?” It begins with faith, which comes from hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). One will never be pleasing unto God without faith (Heb. 11:1, 6; Mark 16:16), nor is our salvation accomplished through faith alone (Jam. 2:24). One's faith will spur him on to comply with all of the directives from God. One's faith will lead him to repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3, 5). One's faith will cause him to confess the glorious name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10). Faith will also cause one to put on their Savior through the watery grave of baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mat. 28:18-20; 1 Pet. 3:21). It is this obedience to the gospel, which puts one into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27) and makes him available for the reward that comes through Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:16-4:8).

Once one has become a child of God through obedience to the gospel of Christ, the old man of sin and sorrow is no more (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). One is now raised to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). One has become a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). One's life is no longer controlled by the old life of sin. One's language, life, or love will no longer be the same. One's daily life will be different because he now has a new master of his life (Rom. 6:16-18). One must face every day prepared to stand for Christ. Paul said to the Church at Ephesus, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13). Without the preparation of our “loins girt about with truth” (Eph. 6:14), one will find insurmountable circumstances in life. To be prepared is to be forearmed. Therefore when one is armed with the truth (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15) and the winds of trials and tribulations blow, the Christian is ready (1 Cor. 10:13). When the storms of temptations brew, the child of God can face the most dreadful storm

because he has battened down the hatches (Jam. 1:12). Many poor decisions will be made simply because one has not taken the time to prepare. Most decisions that are made in haste end in waste. One does not arm himself overnight. It takes years of dedication and a thirst for God's Word. One must be as the Psalmist described a godly man:

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Psa. 1:1-3).

One will either face life prepared or unprepared. How many are prepared to face this life and the one to come? Certainly, it will make a huge difference in one's life!

One reason for the urgency in whether or not one is ready is as Paul told Timothy, "My departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6). For some reason, man usually thinks he has all the time in the world. When in truth, one should realize the uncertainty of time and circumstance. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither *hath he* power in the day of death; and *there is* no discharge in *that* war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it (Ecc. 8:8).

David Lipscomb wrote:

Paul's work was nearly over. He was soon to die for the cause of the Lord. His trial was near or past and he realized that he must soon die, hence the appeal to Timothy. As the old men fall out of the ranks, the young men must press forward to carry on the Lord's work and be watchful and faithful to the truth (5:242).

Seeing that his departure is at hand, will a person recognize the need to prepare? Each has the responsibility to prepare himself for eternity and to prepare others to stand in the gap when he is gone. Paul is a great example of one who helped prepare others for his demise. Some of the greatest advice from an older preacher to a younger preacher is what Paul gave Timothy in 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul warns, "That they teach no other doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3). He tells Timothy to "let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). In 2 Timothy 4:2, he advises Timothy to "Preach the word." Anyone who

preaches would do well to follow the instructions of Paul and, in so doing, would find himself standing in the gap.

REASONS FOR OBTAINING THE CROWN

Paul now states, "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" (2 Tim. 4:7-8a). Because Paul struggled the grand struggle, completed his course and maintained his faith, there was to be waiting on him a crown of righteousness. Some would have one to believe that there is not "one whit" that one can do toward salvation. If this is true, then what is the meaning of these passages? Is Paul stating this is what he did, but no one else has to do these things? Of course not! As a matter of fact, Paul continues to state in verse 8 that this crown of righteousness will be given unto "all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8b). How could anyone come up with the idea that man has nothing to do in salvation? Christ strongly stated, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Paul speaks to Titus saying, "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" (Tit. 2:11-12).

Certainly, God has provided for man the means by which to be saved. It does not place all of the responsibility on God or man. God has done His part in the giving of His only begotten Son on the cross (John 3:16) and making the avenue of salvation available (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). As man, one "**must**" be obedient to God's offer if he is going to be saved. Can man be saved without "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts" or can man be saved without living "soberly, righteously and godly in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12)? Paul simply stated there are some things one must do and some things that must be left undone! Obedience was required of Christ. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9). Nothing less than obedience will be required or expected of man! Christ will be the "author of eternal salvation unto all them that **obey** him" (Heb. 5:9). One can have the same reason that Paul had for his confidence. When one fights the good fight, finishes the course, and keeps the faith, he will have the same assurances that Paul did.

A Christian has to fight the good fight of faith. There is something about *fighting* which is distasteful. No one really likes confrontations, but as sons of God we are enlisted into the battle. Christians are in a **war!** We are to put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11-18). This armor will give us the protection that we need to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Eph. 6:16). Paul tells Timothy of the necessity of this war. “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3-4). Paul explains to Timothy that he needs to “endure hardness” and not to be entangled in the “affairs of *this* life.” In the battle which faithful sons of God are engaged, the only thing that one has to do to give the victory to Satan is simply to quit fighting. It is interesting in 2 Timothy 2:4 that Paul states that one has to **endure** and not be entangled in the affairs of this world to be pleasing to Him who has chosen him to be a soldier. If one chooses to be A.W.O.L., then God is not going to be pleased with that soldier. If one chooses not to engage in the battle because he wants to be *tolerant*, then God is not going to be pleased with that soldier. It is time for Christians to realize that the battle is before us. Our weapons are spiritual (2 Cor. 10:4), and it falls upon us to wage a good fight (1 Tim. 6:12). It is the responsibility, job, and duty of Christians to defend the truth. Jude spoke of this necessity when he said, “That ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

One who is seeking the crown of righteousness and is going to be pleasing to God Almighty must finish the prescribed course. It is not good enough to begin the Christian race and not finish it. Coffman stated, “The Christian race allows that all who run lawfully and diligently may receive the prize (v. 8), provided that, as in the example of the apostle, they *finish* the course” (297-98). Paul answers the question as to how important it is to finish the course when he states:

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

The crown or the reward will be to those who finish. “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end

shall be saved" (Mat. 10:22). The writer of Hebrews penned these words:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1).

The idea of running with patience is the thought of running with endurance. The race that a Christian is in is not the 100-yard dash, but the marathon! One must be prepared to be in the Christian race for the long haul. The Christian can be hindered in his running if he is not careful. Paul asked the church at Galatia: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" (Gal. 5:7). Satan will make sure that there are hundreds of excuses to hinder you. A Christian will have to make up his mind whether or not he is going to be hindered.

One can also note that to receive the crown he must be a part of the right race or the prescribed way. Paul said, "I have finished *my* course" (2 Tim. 4:7)—not some course or any course or even a similar course, but "*my* course." As long as a Christian finishes the prescribed race which is set before him, he will receive the crown. But one must be running the prescribed course. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Mankind has long tried to determine his own way with no success. "O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Without running the prescribed course, no one would be able to receive the crown. Man has always sought his own way which leads to his own destruction. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death" (Pro. 14:12).

Why does man have such a difficult time following the way prescribed by God? It seems that Paul answers this question when he stated:

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:2-3).

Some are not interested in what God wants, but what they want. One should ask himself: "Am I doing what God wants me to do, or am I going about to establish my own righteousness?"

Those who are heavenward bound will be those who have kept the faith. One cannot be, as Paul describes Hymeneus and Alexander:

Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

As a Christian, each must be careful that he does not make shipwreck of his faith. Each is warned to hold his faith. Paul warned those of Corinth. “But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27).

The writer of Hebrews asks the question: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3). That is the reason he had just given the warning about allowing what we have heard to slip. “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip” (Heb. 2:1). The fact is one cannot be pleasing to God without faith. “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Christ said, “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). Christ also told his disciples to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). Why then, would anyone think that they could have faith, lose it, and remain faithful to God? That makes no sense!

THE REWARD

In the description of the Christian reward, Paul maintains the idea of an athlete obtaining or winning the crown. Paul had put forth the effort to strive for and work for the crown. Albert Barnes wrote that this crown was “a crown won in the cause of righteousness, and conferred as the reward of his conflicts and efforts in the cause of holiness” (247). Those who want to obtain the Christian reward must put forth the same effort.

The Christian reward is described in many ways. Christ speaks of a prepared mansion. “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” (John 14:2). John talks of a rest.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

John describes it as a place of comfort. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:4). John also writes that there is no need of light there because "the Lamb *is* the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23). Surely, as one studies the description of the Christian reward, he or she would want to make plans to be a part of it.

Paul understands about the delivery of this crown when he states that Christ, "shall give me at that day." Christ is able to deliver and knows what to deliver. No one is going to fool Christ. There will be no injustices on the day of judgment. No criminal will go free, while those who are innocent will be punished. All will be judged according to what they have done. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Solomon recognized that man is going to stand before God and give account of his life.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).

Christ spoke of man's judgment and the appropriate sentencing of man.

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).

Christ will not be confused as man stands before Him on the day of judgment. When the sentence is passed down, it will be the right one. There will be no appeals and no opportunity to change.

There is a decision involved in the Christian reward. This crown is not something for a elite group, but it is for "all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). The question remains: "Do I love His appearing?" How can one show his love for Christ? Christ answered, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Many want to

speak of their love for Christ, but when it comes time to be counted with Christ, they are nowhere to be found.

This Christian reward is one that must be sought. Of Abraham it is said, “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God” (Heb. 11:10). “But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:16). As one goes through life, he is making plans to spend an eternity somewhere. Abraham made a conscientious choice to be a sojourner in this land to constantly remind him that this land was not his home. Satan is going to do his best to cause everyone to lose sight of what is truly important. He knows man’s weaknesses, and he is going to tempt man to forget the eternal for the physical.

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

The Christian reward is promised to all those who have prepared themselves and have remained faithful unto their calling. It is not limited to an elect group but is extend unto all those who love his appearing. The choice remains for everyone to make. Choose wisely and live!

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“SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES” HEBREWS 12:1

Lynn Parker



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INTRODUCTION

We need encouragement. A difficult journey lies before the Christian between baptism and the grave. Challenges are ever before us. Temptation is never far away, and tribulations come to the faithful—sometimes a drizzle, sometimes a downpour. It might be possible for any child of God to become so distracted with the cares of this life and so discouraged by temptations and trials that he finally quits every effort to reach glory. Through His Word, God reminds us that heaven is for those who endure.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward (Rom. 8:18).

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves; *we are* pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body (2 Cor. 4:7-10).

Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen,

but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Gal. 6:9).

Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin (Heb. 12:1-4).

These passages and a host of others serve as encouragement to the saints. Emphatically they declare: “Do not give up—you can be faithful!”

AN ANCIENT PICTURE WITH MODERN APPLICATION

You might picture the runners at the ancient Olympic games. They have diligently trained for this race. It requires single-minded concentration, whole-hearted devotion, and unwavering endurance. It will not be without difficulty; the participant was never promised a leisurely run down primrose-lined paths. As the runner walks to the starting line, he is keenly aware of family, friends, and runners from past years who cheer from the stands. This partisan band exhorts and encourages him. The race begins and, after just a short distance, the runner notices that some rocks are along the way. If caution is not exercised, he can trip and injure himself. Others runners jostle for position, and even throw an occasional and malicious elbow toward our would-be champion. Still, he runs. Storm clouds are boiling in the sky overhead. The wind blows fiercely in the runner’s face, and the rain shower drenches him. He continues running. A dear friend is nearby the race course. He yells, “Do not quit! Give it your all!” The storm has passed, and all is well until the unabated heat from the glaring sun takes its toll on our runner. His muscles begin to ache and his body screams for water. He recalls the words of a champion from yesteryear: “The victory is to the one who endures.” He runs on. While his body is pushed to the limit, his mind reflects on the training, sacrifice, and dedication of those who have run this very race. To himself he thinks, “Others have done this; I can too.” He thinks about the victor’s crown and the throng that will

celebrate with him at the race's end. He runs on. He *presses* on. He ignores distractions. He refuses to be discouraged by runners who drop to the side of the way in failure. He drops a cloak from his neck to decrease the weight he bears. And finally, the finish line is in sight. With his last reserves of energy, he finishes the course. Victory!

Run The Race With Patience

Written to encourage Christians to remain faithful to Christ, the Hebrews letter reminds us of the promised rest before us, and warns us of the very real danger of apostasy.

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, Like as in the day of the trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tried me by proving me, And saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was displeased with this generation, And said, They do always err in their heart: But they did not know my ways; As I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God: but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin: for we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end: while it is said, To-day if ye shall hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For who, when they heard, did provoke? nay, did not all they that came out of Egypt by Moses? And with whom was he displeased forty years? was it not with them that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that were disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief. Let us fear therefore, lest haply, a promise being left of entering into his rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it (Heb. 3:8-4:1).

The Christian life, in part or whole, is several times pictured by the metaphor of a race. Paul wrote:

Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run; that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they *do it* to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: 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 (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

In the Galatian epistle, Paul expressed his concern that he had "run in vain" if the gospel was compromised by Judaizing teachers (Gal. 2:2). Here he speaks of his labor being bestowed in vain. To the beloved Philippians, Paul's statement is in a similar vein when he commands:

Do all things without murmurings and questionings: that ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that I may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ, that I did not **run in vain** neither labor in vain (Phi. 2:14-16).

As previously noted, the text of Hebrews 12:1 exhorts: “And let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” *Patience* in this verse appears often in the New Testament. It is from the compound Greek word, *hupomone*, and means “an abiding under.” It is endurance, persistent perseverance, in the face of trials (Vine).

How many children of God, having started the race in fine fashion, gave up somewhere along the way? The dead bodies of faithless Israelites lined the wilderness roads just as God said they would (Num. 14:29ff). Lack of faith and disobedience are seen as synonymous (Heb. 3:18-4:6). Every congregation can regretfully point to the names of spiritual casualties. These are the faithless brothers and sisters in the Lord’s family who thought the race too demanding, the rules too narrow, and the cost too great. Perhaps some of these were faithful for a short time but remember, the race lasts a lifetime. The ticking of the clock and turning of the calendar’s pages take a toll in the church as some, having no endurance, simply fold their hands and give up. The cares of this world have claimed more than a few victims from the number of believers. Carefully consider our Lord’s explanation of why some fall away:

And these in like manner are they that are sown upon the rocky *places*, who, when they have heard the word, straightway receive it with joy; and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway they stumble. And others are they that are sown among the thorns; these are they that have heard the word, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful (Mark 4:16-19).

But you do not have to fall away—you can be faithful and complete the race. Peter exhorts: “Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble” (2 Pet. 1:10). Hebrews 11 clearly declares: “Despite trials and temptations, you can finish the race and win the victor’s crown!” Others have met the battle in the heat of the day and remained faithful to God. They serve as that great cloud of witnesses.

So Great A Cloud Of Witnesses

Notice especially that the inspired writer of Hebrews informs us that we are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." Based on the original language, picture now a great throng of godly saints from long ago, lying round about us. In this picture drawn by inspiration, these heroes of faith serve as witnesses. Of, or to, what do they testify? Robertson writes:

The metaphor refers to the great amphitheater with the arena for the runners and the tiers upon tiers of seats rising up like a cloud. The *martures* here are not mere spectators (*theatai*), but testifiers (witnesses) who testify from their own experience (11:2, 4, 5, 33, 39) to God's fulfilling his promises as shown in chapter 11 (5:432).

Another author tells us:

The examples set by them witnessed the fact that faith in God and obedience to his commands will bring the highest and noblest achievements to those who trust in God with unflagging faith (*Teacher's Annual*, 242).

These great heroes of faith speak, even though now dead. Of Abel, inspiration wrote, "He being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4). Consider then the messages we glean from the lives of these faithful men and women. Take renewed courage from their sterling examples.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaketh (Heb. 11:4).

Cain offered a sacrifice to God, but it was rejected. His brother's was accepted (Gen. 4:4-5). No one can separate faith from obedience (Jam. 2:19-22). No one can separate faith from God's Word (Rom. 10:17). Abel, by faith, offered to God an acceptable act of worship. In other words, Abel obeyed God in offering his sacrifice; Cain did not. Abel is among that "great cloud of witnesses" with the timely message for men today that those who please God, God calls righteous when they offer worship that is according to Heaven's will. What God wants can be ascertained (John 8:32). When worship is offered *by faith*, it is certain that it is acceptable and pleasing to God. There need not be any agnosticism on the matter of acceptable religious acts.

This great cloud of witnesses includes the fascinating Enoch.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him: for he hath had witness borne

to him that before his translation he had been well-pleasing unto God (Heb. 11:5).

At the young age of sixty-five, Enoch begat Methuselah after which he “walked with God...three hundred years” (Gen. 5:21ff). Further, the Bible records, “Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Gen. 5:24). Talk of endurance! Three centuries of walking close to God resulted in Enoch being *translated*—that is, he was moved from this life to the hereafter. Look around and see some church members who find it difficult to be faithful for more than a few months at a time. We have even seen some make “confession of fault” on Sunday morning and forsake the assembly that Sunday night. Enoch was faithful to God over the *long-haul*; he was no *flash in the pan*. All should look back over their period of service to God and compare it to Enoch’s three-hundred commendable years. When we are tired from battling trials, weary from discouragement caused by lukewarm brethren, and tempted to slack off in our service to God, we should remember Enoch. Enoch is among that great cloud of witnesses. His life preaches to us a simple but profound sermon of patient, consistent faithfulness.

Among this noble throng is righteous Noah, who found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). If anyone ever questioned the relationship between faith and obedient works, he needs to read the Bible’s estimation of Noah.

By faith Noah, being warned *of God* concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith (Heb. 11:7).

Some foolish souls do not heed warnings. A world of people turned a deaf ear to the preaching of Noah. However, Noah, by faith, “**moved with godly fear.**” By definition, this means to “take hold well or carefully, to show oneself *eulabes*, to act circumspectly or with reverence” (Robertson, 5:421). Noah did not view God as a grandfatherly-type figure to be patronized occasionally. Oh, how our world needs to bow before the great Jehovah God! “The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; *But* the foolish despise wisdom and instruction” (Pro. 1:7).

Noah’s example includes not only respect for God, but respect for the authority of God’s Word. Noah was told to build an ark, build it of gopher wood, and build it according to specified dimensions (Gen.

6:14ff). The record tells us that as God commanded, Noah obeyed (Gen. 6:22). There are rules that apply to participants in a race. There are commands that the Christian must obey. More than simply being sincere, one must do the will of the heavenly Father (Mat. 7:21ff). The lives of the faithful from ages gone by tell us to do **what** God commands, in the **way** God says to do it, **when** God says to do it, and **for the reason** He gives for doing it. Colossians 3:17 tells Christians to do all things by the authority of Christ. Noah would tell all today that they can (1) know God's will, (2) understand God's will, and (3) do exactly what God commands.

Look over the great number of witnesses and see that Abraham serves as an example of genuine trust in God.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a *land* not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:8-10).

By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God *is* able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back (Heb. 11:17-19).

We do not enjoy the unknown. As we get older, change becomes less welcome. We sleep best in our bed, with our own pillows, in our own room. But Abraham, when called, obeyed God and he "he went out, not knowing whither he went." Do we ever think our lot in life is too difficult? Are we ready to walk in Abraham's shoes? By faith Abraham offered his son Isaac. Isaac was the son of promise—the son of Abraham's old age. It is no surprise then that Abraham is called the friend of God (Jam. 2:23). Unwavering trust and fidelity in our God is the legacy left us by Abraham.

Among those whose example exhorts us is Moses. Moses had a choice to make, the consequences of which would have far-reaching effects on his life.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of

Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the firstborn should not touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were swallowed up (Heb. 11:24-29).

Moses' choice was: the pleasures of sin—all that the Egyptian palace could offer—versus the ill-treatment afforded the enslaved Israelites. Many a lesser soul would have been overwhelmed with the allure of power, wealth, and fame. They would have been intimidated with the prospect of suffering ill-treatment with God's people. In that great cloud of witnesses, Moses stands up to say that the pleasures of sin are but for a season. The life of courageous Moses speaks to us of self-denial and looking past the gratification of the immediate moment for the reward which lasts for eternity. At times, even the people Moses led would serve as great discouragements. Our brethren can be stumblingblocks to us if we would allow it. Regardless of the faithlessness of others, we can and must abide faithful. If 1,000 others compromise truth, Moses tells us to take our stand for righteousness. Centuries ago, Moses was confronted with digression and flagrant sin. Rather than pursuing unity-in-diversity and peace at any price in the congregation, Moses stepped forward and demanded to know, "Who *is* on the LORD'S side?" (Exo. 32:26—KJV). Among those appearing to be runners, who is really on the Lord's side? Who is serious about the race?

The great cloud of witnesses goes on to speak of Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Rahab, and others. Their examples encourage those that follow the Lord and look for a far better country.

And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens. Women received their dead by a resurrection: and others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth. And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the

promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Heb. 11:32-40).

Notice especially verse 38: **"of whom the world was not worthy."** Others may be well-known, have more on deposit at the bank, and live with every creature comfort in this life, but we can live today with the promise of an eternal reward by imitating the faith of this great cloud of witnesses.

CONCLUSION

There are many lessons that can be gleaned from the greater context in which our title is found. Here are several:

1. God keeps His promises.
2. The faithful will be victorious.
3. Adversity will come to the faithful.
4. The heaviest of trials have been, and can be, successfully borne.
5. Heaven is surely worth it all.
6. This world is not our home.
7. Others have suffered what we face, and in many cases, much more.

The inspired message of Hebrews 12:1 can be summarized this way: **"Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,"** because of what has been said about the faithful in the previous chapter, in view of their commendable responses to the trials and obstacles of life, with their splendid examples in mind: **"Lay aside every weight."** The faithful put aside every distraction. Nothing is more important than heaven. Nothing is important that does not bring us closer to heaven. **"And the sin which doth so easily beset us."** The faithful child of God is never satisfied to walk even a moment outside the light (1 John 1:7). No sin is allowed to take up abode in the life of the heaven-bound. **"And let us run with patience the race that is set before us."** The faithful endure with steadfastness the trials of this life and day after day, year after year, walk hand in hand with their God. They do not give up. With such examples of great faith in the face of great adversities, to give less than our best to God for the rest of our lives is inexcusable.

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“I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE, NOR FORSAKE THEE” HEBREWS 13:5

Eddie Whitten



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INTRODUCTION

The world is filled with temptations and evil influences. There are many ways of doing things that are wrong. There is also a way of doing that which is right and good. Doing what is right in the sight of God takes courage. In many cases, friends or family begin to drift away from the Old Paths, the way of righteousness (Jer. 6:16), and start walking in the broad way (Mat. 7:13). It requires much courage to stand for the right especially when those so close to us are involved. Hearts are broken when family members and close friends are enticed by evil and forsake the Lord. Disappointments abound when fellow members of the church succumb to the wiles of the devil. But, when beloved and trusted brethren, who preach and teach the gospel, depart from truth and right, more than just courage is needed to stand up against them. It takes a special awareness of, and reliance upon, the Lord Jesus Christ to sustain us in those times.

Remaining faithful to God and His Word is crucial to the salvation of one's soul. Anything short of loyal service in His kingdom is in-

sufficient. Jesus stated, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Mat. 7:21). There are so many influences tugging on our consciences that we need solace and assurance to help us in times of stress and weakness.

We receive such assurance as we read the words of the penman of the book of Hebrews: “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Heb. 13:5). The first part of this verse reflects the words of the penman, yet by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; Gal. 1:12). The last part is a reference to the very words of the Master: “for he hath said.”

Let us consider the great depth and comfort we can derive from these wonderful words.

THE SOURCE OF THE STATEMENT

Men can promise great things. Many men do the very best they can to keep their promises, even when they may not be able to do so. The variables of life are so fragile that even the most sincere intentions are often drastically and perhaps unintentionally altered. Even though we rightfully rely upon the word of man in so many aspects of life, it is understood that circumstances may arise that require a redirection of our original course. Often we compensate for changes with the trite expression: “Well, that’s life!” There is more truth to that statement than most that use it realize. The most secure bastions of our earthly life are, at their best, insecure in the transient nature of life.

In matters involving the eternal welfare of one’s soul, it is far more serious. We do not have the option of casting away, perhaps in disappointment, our first course of action with the wave of our hand, and chart a different course. Even so, in spite of all that men may intend earnestly and sincerely, it is often the case that our promises may be thwarted. The church has suffered in times past, is suffering in the present, and in all probability will suffer in the future because of the empty promises taught or implied by false teachers. False teachers, most of whom are preachers, are lulling indifferent elders and stupefied listeners into following them into perdition through empty promises of a greater and more gratifying relationship with Jesus. All the while, they are following a leader who is also charting a course from whence there is no return. They cannot keep their promises. Jeremiah recorded,

"O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Jesus warned against following the teaching of men. He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 7:21). This statement is in perfect harmony with His statement in Matthew 15:14 about the Pharisees: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

The apostle Paul stated by inspiration, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). Paul explained how that allegiance to men was fruitless and that power to be saved is to be found only in the Lord. The promises of men are not the proper sources for comfort, assurance, and happiness in this world. The loser is always the one to whom the promise was made.

Satan also promises great things. The difference in the promises of men and the promises of Satan is that Satan **knows** he cannot keep his promises. His promises are always in contradiction to that which is right and proper. He wants men to follow him into rebellion against God. He has all sorts of contrivances by which he entices men with all sorts of promises of pleasure and happiness. He would like nothing better than to embrace all men with his treacherous arms of deceit and death. He is bold. He is ruthless. He is tireless. Peter said, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). He promises wealth, power, pleasure, comfort, but he knows that he cannot deliver the things that are so attractive to men. The only promise that can come from following Satan is the promise of eternal damnation, and that promise comes from God!

Satan tried his best to tempt Jesus (Mat. 4:1-11) by appealing to the three avenues of sin: "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," (1 John 2:16). He even quoted Scripture trying to tempt Jesus, to no avail. He knew he could not keep the promises he made to Jesus in those temptations. Satan knew he could not keep his promises, Jesus knew it, and we must know it as well. Thus, Satan is not the proper source for assurance, comfort, and happiness in this world.

Jesus is still different from both man and Satan. Jesus is God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Matthew recorded the words of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the virgin birth of Jesus: “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mat. 1:23). He has the imprimatur of God the Father: “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Mat. 17:5).

Jesus proved His Deity in many ways: through His power over death by raising Lazarus (John 11:43-44), through His power over demons (Mark 5:2-13), through His power over nature (John 2:1-10; Mark 4:39), and through His power over disease (Mark 5:25-34). John stated:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

Jesus proved beyond a shadow of doubt that He not only made and makes promises, but that He can and will keep His promises.

One of the promises Jesus made to His faithful followers is that which is found in our text: “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Heb. 13:5). On this promise, alone, all faithful Christians can rely with no fear of doubt or dispute. This fact being true, that Jesus is faithful to us, let us note some of the areas in which He will not leave us or forsake us.

JESUS WILL NOT LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US IN LIFE

We count life to be precious. Our dreams consist of the things we aspire to do or to become. Plans are made each day and efforts are made to fulfill those plans. We work to accomplish something worthwhile and beneficial to ourselves and to our families. Some accomplish great things in life by which many are benefitted. We go about our duties with different attitudes and enthusiasm. Depending upon the opportunity, the mood, the resources at our disposal, success is attained in our field. Perhaps there may be temporary setbacks that must be

overcome, so we labor. Life is filled with pitfalls and obstacles with which all people must deal.

Early in life, children see exciting and challenging activities, and many want to emulate what they see. Young boys want to be firemen, pilots, cowboys, doctors, policemen, or perhaps all of them at different times. Their aspirations change with the years. As time passes, some pursue their dreams and become successful, but death, disease, poverty, and deception dash the dreams of others. Every life is subject to the prince of this world, and he is ever active in his quest for the conquest of the soul.

We look at the condition of the world politically, socially, economically, scientifically, and psychologically. What we see is not too encouraging. Nations are constantly at war. Men are often cruel and inhuman in their treatment of others. Thousands of lives are taken every day in the most horrible ways. No compassion is extended, and no quarter is given. Women and children are slaughtered as if they were cattle. Human life is meaningless to the hordes.

Ruthless, greedy men sometimes prey on the helpless and unsuspecting and cheat honest people out of their life's savings. Crime is rampant in the world, and nothing is moral or sacred in their thinking. Murders are committed with little thought of remorse or regret. Consideration for the sanctity of womanhood is nonexistent in the throes of sensual gratification of the predator. All of the bad things that bad men and women do are reflected in some way in the lives of all that live in the world.

The laws of nature destroy lives and property, as well as the hopes of many. Hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, earthquakes, volcanoes, lashing waves, and other catastrophes come sometimes unexpectedly.

The patriarch Job made an astute observation: "Man *that is* born of a woman *is* of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job 14:1-2). The wise Solomon joined Job in the same thought:

I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit (Ecc. 1:12-14).

In these two passages, Job and Solomon observe that life is short, transient. Troubles and sorrow also attend it. He lives for a while; then

he is gone. Solomon was a mighty king, endowed with wisdom from God. Yet, his evaluation of life, determined by his own experience, was that all life has to offer is vanity. It is without worth when it is lived to satisfy the human lust. No wonder he enjoined upon man the plea: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecc. 12:1). The process of aging is presented in the following verses of Ecclesiastes 12 and culminates in the declaration: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ecc. 12:7). The apostle Peter wrote: "For all flesh *is* as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away" (1 Pet. 1:24). Hebrews 9:27 states unequivocally: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." One of the more beautiful passages dealing with the brevity of life is found in Psalms 90:10: "The days of our years *are* threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength *they be* fourscore years, yet *is* their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

The earth and all that God created is perfect. The beauties and grandeur of God's creation cannot be adequately expressed. But since sin entered into the world and death by sin (Rom. 5:12), Satan has ruled in the earth. Only by the power of God through the advent of His Son, Jesus, has Satan been controlled. Those who are obedient to the gospel of Christ and have become the children of God through Him, have overcome the power of Satan. Jesus was victorious over Satan by His resurrection from the dead, and is Lord of Lords and King of Kings (1 Tim. 6:15). We are not required to look to the promises of men or of Satan. We have the promise of Jesus that, in life, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"!

JESUS WILL NOT LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US IN DEATH

Approximately six thousand years ago a tragedy happened that would affect every individual that would ever live. Sin entered the world through the powerful influence of Satan. The ugly and hateful word, *death*, became a reality. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Every person will come to the end of his/her days all too soon. Some are fortunate enough to live many years. Some are

taken in the flower of their youth. Regardless of the number of days one may be granted, one day he will draw his last breath and will pass from this life. Sin is the cause of this travesty.

The cycle of life repeats itself with every generation. A baby is born into the world, grows according to the natural development of the body and mind, attains maturity, and ages according to the permission of health. In spite of all of the advanced technology science has to offer, it cannot stay the inevitable day of death.

The majority of mankind, during this relentless cycle, will choose to follow Satan into eternal destruction. Jesus warned the world in this regard: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Mat. 7:13). It is a tragic thought to contemplate the majority of the world being lost in eternal damnation, but it is a personal choice; it does not have to be that way.

Most people who claim "Christianity" as their religion are familiar with the beautiful verse often referred to as the "golden text of the Bible": John 3:16. That verse states: "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." It is not the will of God that men should be lost, but men choose the course of life that appeals to them. Because of the desire of man to reject God, he chooses condemnation. Jesus went on to say (in the context of John 3:16) "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (v. 19). The very nature of these words implies the desire of God for man to be saved. The choice between everlasting life and everlasting loss is left to man.

What we have, then, is summarized in this fashion. A person is born into the world sinless. He grows until he is subjected to sin and succumbs to the wiles of the devil. He has a choice of obeying the gospel of Christ with the resultant reward of forgiveness of sins, or he has a choice of accepting the temptations of Satan with the resultant sentence of everlasting separation from God. If he chooses to follow Satan, he dies without hope and will spend eternity in hell. If he chooses to follow Jesus, obey the gospel, and live in accord with the will of God, he has the hope eternal life.

The person who dies disobedient to the gospel dies “having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). The person who has developed his faith through the preaching and study of God’s Word (Rom. 10:17) has an entirely different outlook on life and an expectation of joy in eternity through Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are many passages of Scripture that assure us that Jesus will be with us as we make the transition from earthly to eternal life. One of the most comforting of all Scriptures is the beautiful 23rd Psalm. It was my privilege many years ago to attend the last hours of a gallant servant’s life. He was a military officer who was suffering the final ravages of cancer. A nurse had informed me that he had asked for me to come to his bedside. When I arrived, he was fighting with all the strength he could muster. I reminded him that his life as a Christian had prepared him for this moment and that our Master was waiting to help him across Jordan. I read for him the 23rd Psalm: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psa. 23:4). His response will live with me until I join him in eternity. He said, “I had forgotten that! I am going to give it a go!” His struggling, labored breathing became calmer with the assurance that Jesus was with him in that desperate hour. It was but a short time later that he left the cancer-ridden tabernacle for a home not made with hands.

Is it any wonder that the Psalmist also said, “Precious in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of his saints” (Psa. 116:15)? He, through our obedience to the gospel, has made us alive. Paul wrote, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16). Having become obedient to the gospel, and having received the forgiveness of all past sins, the child of God has been made alive spiritually. Then, when he dies, the beauty of that righteousness is seen in the eternal safety of his soul. It is difficult for man to see through the eyes of the Lord the beauty of the salvation of the soul of him who has been faithful. Jesus will say of the faithful servant, “Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mat. 25:21).

In all of the trials and tribulations of life, the final end of earthly days will culminate in death. Those who have been faithful in obedi-

ence to the gospel and in service in His kingdom have the promise of Jesus that "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" in death.

JESUS WILL NEVER LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US IN JUDGMENT

The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthian church regarding the resurrection of Jesus, stated, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). His emphasis was on the hope we have in Jesus after this life is over. The resurrection of Jesus is paramount to faith. If it had been true that the Christ had not been resurrected (as the false apostles of that day were teaching), then, as Paul points out, our faith would be in vain and we would still be in our sins. The fact of the matter is, however, that Jesus was resurrected from the dead; therefore, we can be assured that we will be victorious over Satan when we are resurrected in the Day of Judgment.

Jesus declared:

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).

It is a foresworn fact that there will be a resurrection of the body when time comes for the earth to be consumed with the fire of heaven (2 Pet. 3:10). Many teach, and many more affirm, that there will not be such a thing as the resurrection of the body in the Day of Judgment. Peter talked about the scoffers who would deny there would be a day of reckoning. He wrote:

That there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

Scoffers of today deny the Deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, the existence of God, the sanctity of the church of Christ, the hope of eternal life, and especially the idea of a day of the resurrection of the dead. The affirmation of their denial of these spiritual realities does not, in any way, annul the truth of the same. It is nothing more than another claim by man to be superior to God, which cannot be.

Paul, speaking to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill, said:

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).

There will come a time when all men will stand to be judged. Paul stated, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). The judgment that will come will be for all men. Jesus gave the criteria by which all men will be judged. “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).

In the judgment scene as described by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:10-12, he compares the judgment to a farmer winnowing his wheat. Concerning Jesus he said, “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” (v. 12).

The conclusion is clear: There will be a Day of Judgment, and there will be the resurrection of the dead to face that judgment. The question is, what will happen to us on that day? To the faithful, we have the assurance of Jesus that He will be with us. He said:

In my Father’s house are many mansions: if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also (John 14:2-3).

John wrote, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

As sure as the resurrection is and as sure as the Day of Judgment is, we can be just as sure that in that Judgment, Jesus will “never leave us, nor forsake us.”

CONCLUSION

The preacher, Solomon, summarized the spectrum of existence well as he came to the conclusion of his life. After describing the days of man, he said:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring

every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).

There will be the days of youth, the days of age and failing faculties, death and judgment. In view of these salient facts, the faithful Christian can live his life, die at the end of his days, and face the judgment, with the unwavering faith that in every aspect of his existence, Jesus will never leave us, nor forsake us!

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“CASTING ALL YOUR CARE UPON HIM; FOR HE CARETH FOR YOU”

1 PETER 5:7

Paul Sain



Paul Sain has been preaching for 40 years, beginning speaking at the age of 15. His father, brothers, uncle, son-in-law, nephews, and others are preachers. He has written and compiled several books: *Ready Reference For Growing Christians*; *Jesus Died That You Might Be Saved*; plus *Studying Through The Bible* class material. Paul and LaDon have been married for 36 years and have three daughters and 5 grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

Our theme for this series is *Encouraging Statements Of The Bible*. The particular passage we will examine at this time is a brief, yet ever so powerful, eleven words, is found in one of the books from the inspired Simon Peter, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

THE CONTEXT OF OUR ENCOURAGING STATEMENT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT

God’s faithful followers (in the first century, at the time the words from our encouraging statement were penned) were facing severe persecution. Of the twelve apostles, Peter knew some crucial key truths. Having personally walked with, heard His instruction, watched His signs and wonderous miracles, marveled at His compassion and love, and eagerly sat at the feet of the Son of God, Peter knows: (1) Jesus Christ was the true and living Son of God. (2) The Savior was *able* to do good (Acts 10:38), as well as raise the dead, heal the lame, restore sight to the blind, etc. He was abundantly *able* to do supernatural, unexplainable, phenomenal things. (3) The Word of God was powerful and able to save the obedient from their sins (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12;

Jam. 1:21-25). (4) The Savior truly loved and cared for people. He left heaven and came to live on earth among sinful man to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; Mat. 1:21). He wanted all to hear, believe, and obey. (5) The Savior demonstrated care, compassion, longsuffering, love, etc., to ones with whom He came in contact. (6) Our Lord knew what it was to be tempted, tested, tried, belittled, mocked, lonely, abandoned by friends, lied to, and betrayed. Truly, He was tempted in all ways as we are today, yet He was without sin (Heb. 4:15).

The author of our encouraging statement was Simon Peter. He witnessed the Savior healing his mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31). Jesus miraculously gave him the large catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11). Peter knew it was the Savior who helped him pay his temple tax (Mat. 17:24-27). Peter impulsively asked the Lord to bid him to come walk on water, and Jesus helped him (Mat. 14:22-33). In the garden of Gethsemane, Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, and then he watched as the Lord healed him (Luke 22:50-51; John 18:10-11). Peter understood it was the Savior who delivered him from prison (Acts 12).

Peter knew *fiery trials* faced followers of Christ. It was especially difficult living the Christian life in the first century (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:16). People were killed for merely confessing their faith in Christ. Some were stoned to death (Acts 7:58). Others, because they believed in Christ, told others about Christ, were beaten (Acts 5:39-42), put in prison (Acts 16:25; Phi. 2:17), and falsely accused (Mat. 5:11-12). At times, it was necessary for Christians to leave home (Acts 8:4) for their physical welfare and survival.

DEFINING THE TERMS

Care means “anxiety, the state of being pulled apart.” The reason we have *cares* (trials, afflictions, persecutions) is because we have an ever militant and vicious enemy. Peter explains and warns God’s followers about the enemy in the verses following our text. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Satan is aggressive and determined. If he does not presently have you as a follower, he fervently desires you. He will do whatever it takes to convince you to follow him and his way. He will lie, deceive, use his *wiles*, be cunning and crafty. The truth of Satan’s willingness to go to any cost to get any and all is

clearly demonstrated in his actions with biblical characters. He lied to Eve! He was deceitful time and again to those in the Old and New Testament.

Christians can live peaceful, worry-free lives. The Scriptures state we can live blameless lives (Tit. 2:11-14), but this certainly does not suggest we can or must live a sinless life. We can enjoy lives on earth without the strain, stress, worry, and distress. How? **Only** when we place our cares on Him, the only begotten Son of God. **Only** when we trust His promises can we receive the blessings assured His faithful followers.

JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR

Of the many blessings promised to God's people, the privilege of placing our cares on our Lord and letting Him take care of them is one of the greatest. There are conditions that must be met to enjoy this privilege. One must be "in Christ" to receive spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3; Gal. 3:26-27). While Christ wants to be the Savior of all, it is a fact He will save, bless, and help those who are "children of God" (Gal. 3:26ff; Heb. 5:8-9; Mat. 7:21; Luke 6:46).

Let us note once again the facts regarding our relationship to the wonderful Savior. "In Christ" we have the following from One who cares for us:

1. We can be victorious—courage to face our cares/not run away (Isa. 41:10).
2. Knowledge (wisdom) to understand what is required of us and how to accomplish it (Jam. 1:5).
3. Strength to do what we must do (Phi. 4:13).
4. Faith to trust Him to do the rest (Psa. 37:5).

The Savior certainly *cares* for you. Our finite minds cannot possibly grasp the magnitude of the action of the Savior willingly leaving heaven, to come to this wicked, sin-filled world. That action within itself is beyond our imagination. But to add the fact that the Son of God knew that He would suffer, be despised, rejected, as a Man of Sorrows (as the prophet Isaiah prophesied in chapter 53), further intensifies the reality of the Savior's care and love for everyone. He came to do the will of the Father (John 6). Even from the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed for the cup to be removed if possible, nevertheless He sought and wanted only for the will of Almighty God to be done.

Obviously, the death of the Son of God on the cruel cross was the complete, final, and all-important proof of His *care* for you and me. He did not send angels to die. He did not abandon the plan after His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He did not come down from the cross when He was being mocked, ridiculed, and spat upon. He did not give it all up as He witnessed His mother suffering because of her son hanging on a cross as a common criminal. He did not say, "They don't even know why I am doing this, and thus I quit." He endured the cross, despising the shame (Tit. 2:11-14), making it possible for our sins to be forgiven (Heb. 9:22), purchasing the church (Acts 20:28).

Note the tender and precious words of the treasured hymn, "Does Jesus Care" (written by J. Lincoln Hall in 1901). Note how personal, loving, and reassuring it is to know of the care of our Lord and Savior:

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained

Too deeply for mirth and song,

As the burdens press and the cares distress,

And the ways grow weary and long?

Does Jesus care when my way is dark

With a nameless dread and fear?

As the daylight fades into deep night shades,

Does He care enough to be near?

Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed

To resist some temptation strong?

When for my deep grief I find no relief

Tho' my tears flow all the night long?

Does Jesus care when I've said "good-by"

To the dearest on earth to me,

And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks

Is it aught to Him? Does He see?

CHORUS:

O yes, He cares, I know He cares,

His heart is touched with my grief;

When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,

I know my Savior cares.

So many additional familiar songs convey this same powerful, assuring message. Note a few of them. First, Walter S. Martin's 1901 hymn:

Be not dismayed whate'er betide,

God will take care of you;

Beneath His wings of love abide,

God will take care of you.

No matter what may be the test,
 God will take care of you;
 Lean, weary one, upon His breast,
 God will take care of you.

Certainly we are spiritually strengthened when we hear or sing the words of Charles C. Converse's (1868) famous hymn:

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
 All our sins and griefs to bear!
 What a privilege to carry
 Ev'rything to God in prayer!
 O what peace we often forfeit,
 O what needless pain we bear,
 All because we do not carry
 Ev'rything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?
 Is there trouble anywhere?
 We should never be discouraged;
 Take it to the Lord in prayer;
 Can we find a friend so faithful,
 Who will all our sorrows share?
 Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness,
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Add also the precious words of Lloyd O. Sanderson (1935):

Yes, for me, for me He careth,
 With loving, tender care;
 Yes, with me, with me He shareth,
 Each burden and each fear.
 Yes, o'er me, o'er me He watcheth,
 Ceaseless watcheth night and day;
 Yes, e'en me, e'en me He snatcheth
 From perils of the way.

While we may already be aware of this fact, it certainly is worthy of additional mention. The Son of God is *able* to help with all our needs and cares. His ability to help far exceeds our need. He is all-powerful. His Herculean, powerful shoulders can easily carry our trivial load and sustain us through difficult times.

CARES AND BURDENS CHRISTIANS FACE

At times in our lives it would be the easier course of action to worry, fret, and complain. The devil might seek to convince us that we are being mistreated and abused. Things may be *unfair* in what others may say or do to us. If we allow such petty feelings to simmer and

fester in our minds, taking us away from the Savior, we will miss the rich and abundant blessings of our Savior.

All Christians will have cares, trials, temptations, and will be persecuted. Paul boldly instructed Timothy, his son in the faith, that all who live godly lives **will** suffer persecution. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Simon Peter admonished: "Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:16).

Many who have gone before have suffered greatly. The Lord taught us to remember the persecuted prophets who have gone before: "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Mat. 5:12). Naturally, we should always keep the vicarious suffering and death of our Messiah continually before our mind's eye. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:2-3). We should remember what the apostle Paul endured, for the sake of his Lord, after he made a complete change in his life:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours 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 (2 Cor. 11:23-27).

Friend, if Satan can get into our lives just a little, he will demand and seek more. In a similar fashion, if we allow and keep the *little* cares in our lives, soon they will become *big* ones.

Listen to the admonitions to perseverance and endurance:

1. Endure to the end (Mat. 10:22).
2. Be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).
3. Press toward the prize (Phi. 3:12-14).
4. Go on toward perfection (Heb. 6:1).

Let us learn from Daniel. In the long ago this young one took a righteous course of action as he:

Purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself (Dan. 1:8).

Let us set our affections on things above (Col. 3:1-8), seek first the kingdom of God (Mat. 6:33), and press toward the prize (Phi. 3:12-14). As we do this, we will make up our minds to live sober, righteous, and godly lives (Tit. 2:11-14). We make up our minds to serve God regardless of what the entire world may choose to do. We are committed to live for Him acceptably, worship Him regularly, have Him live in us, and rule our lives. Then as new problems (trials, temptations, and difficulties) arise, we merely remember that we have already made the decision to cast our cares on Him. We have already determined that nothing of this world will overcome us, discourage us, or defeat us. We are determined to secure the victory of which Paul spoke (1 Cor. 15:57). We are looking unto Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

CASTING ALL YOUR CARE ON HIM

In addition to the words of Simon Peter in 1 Peter 5:7, listen to similar words as the psalmist lovingly urge all to: "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psa. 55:22).

Simon Peter (as he penned the words found in our *encouraging statement*) possibly had his mind on the words of the Lord which we have recorded in Matthew 6. Listen once again (maybe as if for the first time) to the words of our Lord as He pleads in the powerful *Sermon on the Mount* for all to:

Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? **Behold the fowls** of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And **why take ye thought** for raiment? **Consider the lilies** of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe

you, O ye of little faith? **Therefore take no thought**, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewith shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But **seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness**; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Mat. 6:25-34).

In one of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible, the apostle Paul gives us an encouraging, uplifting, assuring promise of God. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Christians may not always know exactly why something happens, may not understand why the wicked seem to prosper, may question if Satan has too much power, etc., but, dear brother and sister, always remember the above words. One day, all things will be set straight.

CONCLUSION

How reassuring for God's people to know we are not alone. We not only have one another, those of like precious faith (2 Pet. 1:1), but the Savior is with us all the way. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, **lo, I am with you always, even** unto the end of the world. Amen" (Mat. 28:20).

The Savior has walked on earth. He knows what it is to be tempted, tested, and tormented. He knows the way to heaven, and tenderly invites all to come to Him for redemption so desperately needed by all mankind.

Come unto me, all *ye* that labour 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 (Mat. 11:28-30).

Then in John's account of the gospel we find these wonderful words of our Lord and Savior, as He reassures those of the first century (as well as everyone today):

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Let us walk in the light (1 John 1:7f), faithfully and steadily toward the prepared mansion awaiting God's faithful. As the trials come upon

us, let us avail ourselves of the solution available to us, casting all our care upon him, for He careth for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.