

Articles by Robert Gessner

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A Study in Contrasts: Man's Thinking vs. God's

1. Expectation/Corruption

A man spends his whole life building up an enormous estate. In his later years, he looks back over his accumulations and awaits in expectation for all the benefits that he and his family will reap in the years to come.

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption.” (Gal. 6:6,7)

Are we in harmony with God in our thinking? How much time, energy, and goods we spend on things that will not last!

2. Immortality /Dust

They laid the famous man carefully into the casket. His body was embalmed and clothed with the luxurious robes of royal splendor. His gold ring was left on his hand and a priceless necklace was hung around his neck. The tomb was made of material that would never wear out. It was proclaimed that a man of such a reputation as this one should be buried in splendor so that he might live on in immortality in the ages to come.

“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen. 3:19)

Are we in harmony with God in our thinking? How hard we try to get a name for ourselves here on earth!

3. Something/Nothing

The banquet hall is filled. Men who had worked hard for a long period of time were congratulating one another for the magnificent buildings and city that they had helped to build. To live to see this day was really something and it demonstrated the marvelous wisdom and wonder that a group of men could display when working together.

“Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.” (Rev. 18:16,17)

Are we in harmony with God in our thinking? We so often think we have really done something when in reality it shall be brought to nothing!

4. Design/Vanity

All the great minds of the day were gathered at the vast conference room in the big city. They had carefully laid the plans that they were sure would finally bring peace to the valley that had been warring for so many years. Their design for peace had been thoroughly planned and they could not foresee any reason why it would not work.

“Saying, peace, peace, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). “There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked” (Isa. 57:21). “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind” (Eccl. 1:14). “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind” (Eph. 4:17).

Are we in harmony with God in our thinking? How often we think the resources of this world will solve the spiritual needs of our life!

5. Tomorrow/Vapor

After many calls and conferences, the business trip is finalized. The business man was ready to embark on what should be the most profitable trip he has ever taken. He has a list of great contacts and a product to sell that is moving well on the market right now. He feels that he has finally reached the peak of his career and tomorrow the big trip begins.

“Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” (Jam. 4:13,14)

Are we in harmony with God in our thinking? How often we make plans for the tomorrow that may never come and waste the day that is set before us!

Are We Asleep at a Critical Hour

Besides this you know what a critical hour this is, how it is high time now for you to wake up out of your sleep-rouse to reality. For salvation (final deliverance) is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone and the day is almost here. Let us then drop (fling away) the works and deeds of darkness and put on the (full) armor of light. (Rom. 13:11,12, Amplified Version).

The church today in our society has become very comfortable in the world. We are no longer tent-dwellers. We have built ourselves houses and we have settled down for a long stay in this world. There is "the awful tendency to sink down (as did the ten virgins in Matt. 25:5) into slumber and sleep - into a state of spiritual insensibility in which no Christian duties are effectively done. Believers are to know the season. Our Lord sternly arraigned the Jews of His day for their ignorance concerning the time... They did not apply themselves to know the time they were in, although they could have known it, both from the prophetic Word which was being fulfilled before their eyes in Christ; and also if they had set themselves to judge truly of the moral conditions about them and the necessities of action involved therein. If the Jews even then were called hypocrites by our Lord, how much more this should arouse us who have so much greater light and knowledge, in view of Christ's death and resurrection, and the presence of the Holy Spirit; and the certainty of

our Lord's coming, and our uncertainty as to the day and hour!" (William Newell)

There are three areas that would suggest the causes for our sleepy condition. These are illustrated in the Old Testament. Let us review them so that we might be awakened to our condition.

I. The daily routines of our busy life have dulled our sense of the ' reality of the impending judgment that is coming upon this world.

And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. (Lk. 17:26,27)

For God spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly... Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water; whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." (2 Pet. 2:5; 3:4-6)

While Noah constructed the ark, he demonstrated his belief that this world was under the coming judgment of God. His hammers and saws were not used to build better places for his temporary dwelling, but he used his time to prepare for a coming judgment. "When the Lord comes the second time He will not find the whole world waiting to receive Him, but sin will be rampant as in the days of Noah. Observe that the antediluvians were

interested in the ordinary things that occupy the minds of men and women. They did not believe the message of Noah, but lived in utter indifference to God until the day when Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them. So we gather from this passage that the world will go on as it is going now. Men will be occupied with the various affairs of life but indifferent to the claims of Jesus until that hour when He returns." (Harry Ironside)

II. We are so busy in the pursuit of modern conveniences and comforts that we have forgotten that all these things will one day be destroyed.

For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it. So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, Get up, get out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city! But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking. (Gen. 19:13,14) As it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. (Lk. 17:28,29) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (2 Pet. 3: 10)

The world refuses to believe it, the church prefers to forget it, but this world and everything in it will be utterly destroyed. All of our works that were done to make this world a better place in which to live, will be

wiped out. They have no eternal value whatever. "All that about which the children of this world are so intensely anxious - after which they are so eagerly grasping - for which they are so fiercely contending - all - all will be burned up. And who can tell how soon? Where are the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha - those cities which were once all life and stir and bustle? Where are they now? All gone! swept away by the judgment of God! consumed by His fire and brimstone! Well, His judgments now hang over this guilty world. The day is at hand; and while judgments impend, the sweet story of grace is being told out to many an ear. God grant that the reader of these lines may know what it is (with a conscience purged from sin, his heart's affections purged from the defiling influence of the world), to wait for the Son from heaven." (C. H. Mackintosh)

III. We have developed an attitude of settling down, permanency, feeling at home; we have forgotten that we do not really belong here nor are we really wanted here.

So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation. The children of Machir, the son of Mannasseh were also brought up on Joseph's knees. And Joseph said to his brethren, I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. (Gen. 50:22-24)

And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. Now there

arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.... Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. (Ex. 1:6-8,11)

The children of Israel became very comfortable in Egypt. Perhaps they began to think they would be there permanently. They lived under a beneficent government and began to prosper greatly. They had to be reminded that God had other purposes for them. "We are reaching the very end of the times of Joseph. However, before we witness his death, we have a fine instance of faith's acquaintance with the course of the world's history. The children of Israel were at that time very happy in the land of Egypt. They were in the full favor of the king; they were in possession of the richest district in the country, and they saw one of themselves the second person in the kingdom. Not a single symptom of danger or of change appeared in all their condition. But in the midst of all this, Joseph speaks of God visiting them; words which bespeak days of sorrow to be at hand, such days as that God would then be their only friend and helper. Strange this was, very strange! Who could believe it? Was Joseph dreaming? No, Joseph was not dreaming. God's word was his wisdom. The divine oracle in Gen. 15:13-16 had forewarned that Egypt would afflict Israel, but that God would befriend them, and bring them back to Canaan-and this word from God was everything to Joseph, was everything to faith-appearances were not and thus by faith Joseph saw Israel's affliction in the day of Israel's brightest promise and prosperity - he saw Egypt's enmity in this day of Egypt's friendship - he saw brick-kilns and taskmasters in the fair fields and sunny harvest of Goshen. Is it not to be thus with faith still? Have we not warrant, by faith in the

word of God, to know the course which this world, with all its growing refinement and varied progress, is taking every hour? Have we not reason to know that it is on its way to judgment. Indeed we have!" (J. G. Bellett)

Comments On Critical Passages for Critical Times

Passage One

Caught in the web of materialism – 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Vs. 6,7,8 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 clothing, with these we shall be content. Godliness is ever accompanied with contentment in a greater or less degree; all truly godly people have learned with Paul, in whatever state they are, to be therewith content (Phil. 4:11). They are content with what God allots for them, well knowing that this is best for them. We brought nothing with us into this world, and yet God provided for us, care was taken of us, we have been fed all our life long unto this day; and therefore, when we are reduced to the greatest straits, we cannot be poorer than when we came into this world, and yet then we were provided for; therefore, let us trust in God for the remaining part of our pilgrimage. We shall carry nothing with us out of this world. Why should we not be content with a little? Because, no matter how much we have, we must leave it behind us (Eccl. 5:15,16). Hence he infers, if God gives us the necessary supports of life, we ought to be content therewith, though we have not the ornaments and delights of it. If nature should be content with a little, grace should be content with less. Though we have not dainty food, though we have not costly raiment, if we have but food and raiment convenient for us we ought to be content. Matthew Henry Vs. 9 – But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into

many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. The word BOULOMAI, rendered "desire," implies a deliberate grasping after wealth as a dominating object in life. The danger lies in attempting to acquire for one's own ends more than satisfies one's needs (Prov. 28:20). There is perhaps a suggestion of various stages in the descent to which the desire leads. To begin with, there is certainly in aiming at the increase of riches a temptation to aim at the acquisition of more, and this carried with it the danger of gaining it by doubtful or unrighteous means, a veritable snare. This trap is used of the allurements to evil by which the devil ensnares a person (2 Tim. 2:26). Here it indicates the seductions to evil which result from tendencies within. There is a further snare of being involved in worldly associations. The series now broadens out to a variety of foolish and hurtful lusts; foolish because the determination to obtain wealth tends to involve a passionate craving for things undesirable; hurtful because of the injury done not only to the soul but to the body. The metaphor of drowning is suggestive of the suddenness with which calamity falls upon the self-willed aspirant. What may appear to outward observers as a sudden disaster is here shown to be the climax of a course of evil. W. E. Vine Vs. 10 - For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Not all evil in the universe springs from the love of money. But it is certainly one of the great sources of many varieties of evil. For instance, it leads to envy, strife, theft, dishonesty, intemperance, forgetfulness of God, selfishness, embezzlement, etc. It is not money in itself which is spoken of, but the love of money. Money might

be used in the service of the Lord in a variety of ways where only good would result. But here it is the inordinate desire for money that leads to sin and shame. One particular evil of the love of money is a wandering from the Christian faith. In their mad striving after gold, men neglect spiritual things, and it becomes difficult to tell whether they were ever really saved at all. Not only did they lose their grip on spiritual values, but they pierced themselves through with many sorrows. William MacDonald Passage Two Falling asleep on the job – Romans 13:11-14 Vs. 11 – And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. It is time to awake out of sleep, such sleep as the world all around us is in (1 Thess 5:6), knowing nothing of what is at hand. But with a certainty which comes by believing the last recorded word of the living Lord in heaven, “Surely I come quickly” (Rev. 22:20), the Christian knows that now his salvation in its fullness, including the redemption of the body, is nearer than when he believed, on that happy day, when by faith in the Great Redeemer, salvation from sin’s penalty and power, became a personal possession, and the bright and blessed hope of glory, first lit up his soul. John Ritchie Vs. 12 – The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. The night signifies the whole period of man’s alienation from God (1 Thess. 5:5). The day is the day of Christ, to be introduced when the Lord comes to receive His saints to Himself. The believer is to have no fellowship with darkness (Eph. 5:11). As the believer is now in the night season, he is involved in conflict with the spiritual forces of darkness, and victory can be gained only by putting on the armor

of light. As spiritual light can be received only by those who are born of God, so alone by such can righteousness in character and conduct, of which the armor of light consists, be worn. For they alone are sons of light.

W.E.Vine Vs. 13 – Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. Men choose the night for their revels; but our night is past. Let us therefore do what is fit for the light and for the day. We belong to that day which our Lord's coming will usher in; therefore, let us walk as those already in the daylight of that day. How needful the warning to keep clear of these things in this hour when the time of "the iniquity of the end" (Ezk.

21:25,29) is drawing nigh. David said, "The floods of ungodliness made me afraid" (Ps. 18:4). Earth's steadily increasing tide of Noah's-day wickedness would terrify us, did we not know that the Lord is coming, to deliver His saints and to judge this very wickedness. William R. Newell Vs. 14 – But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. The true secret of Christian living is stated, first positively and then negatively. Positively; the Christian is to put on Christ as a garment. He is the soul's true clothing.

Negatively; no forethought is to be taken for the sinful nature. No preoccupation of mind with anything except with Christ. This is the Christian's twofold method of victory. He is not to fight in his own strength, but commit himself to Him Who has won the victory. We are to say "no" to the flesh on every occasion and occupy ourselves solely with the Lord Jesus Christ in the personal appropriation of faith. W. H. Griffith Thomas Passage Three Functioning in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:11-14)

Vs. 11 - But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. We have no right to say we want such and such a gift. "As He will." If He bestows, let us recognize and use the gift. If He withhold, and does not bestow any particular gift, it is still within His own will, and according to His infinite wisdom. Paul gives illustrations of nine gifts that are bestowed within the entity and company of the church. Differentiation will be found all the way through. There are these diversities of gifts and there is always an intimate relationship of one gift with another. You have one, and I have another, and someone else a third, a fourth, a fifth; and they are all intimately related. They are separated, but related; and the unifying principle is the Personality of the Holy Spirit Who bestows gifts as He will. They are never in conflict with one another, and they are all contributing to the fulfillment of function, not of the individual but of the church. G. Campbell Morgan Vs. 12 - For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. The human body is an illustration of unity and diversity. Although all believers are different and perform different functions, yet they all combine to make one functioning unit—the body. All believers are members of the Body of Christ. Just as the human body is a vehicle by which a person expresses himself to others, so the Body of Christ is the vehicle on earth by which He chooses to make Himself known to the world. It is an evidence of wonderful grace that the Lord would ever allow the expression "the Christ" to be used to include those of us who are members of His body. William Macdonald Vs. 13 - For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all

been made to drink into one Spirit. In Acts 2, the Spirit “filled all the house where they were sitting”; but they also were “filled with the Spirit.” They were in the Spirit, and the Spirit was in them. These two things are true of every child of God. In the Spirit they are constituted members of one body—one with Christ the Head, and one with every fellow-member. And not only so, but that same Spirit dwells in every child of God. Who that has formed any conception of this Divine thought of the oneness of the body of Christ, through the baptism and indwelling of the Spirit of God, can fail to be amazed at the spectacle now presented in Christendom with its hundreds of sects, each professing to constitute in itself a body, with a distinct membership, and practically denying both the unity constituted by the Spirit and the power for edification that is provided by the indwelling of the Spirit. But in spite of all man’s failure, this unity remains intact according to the purpose of God. It is altogether of God, a Divine work in which man can neither make, nor mar, nor meddle. J. R. Caldwell Vs. 14 – For in fact the body is not one member but many. As men and women not yet glorified we still possess that old carnal nature. Even though set apart to God in Christ with new natures, we so often still find working within us envy and jealousy, and there is the tendency to say, “Well, as I cannot do what so and so does, I will not do anything,” and so discontent is engendered. Remember that every member of your physical body has its own special function. If every member of the body does its own work and does it well, the whole body is benefitted thereby. (Eph. 4:3,16) Just so the church or assembly of God. He does not gift everyone in the same way; some have special public ministry, others have quiet, private service for the Lord,

but all are important. I think I shall never have the least inkling until I get to Heaven and stand at the judgment seat of Christ, how much I have owed to quiet saints shut away in hidden places who have bowed on their knees before God and asked His blessing upon my ministry. I have had the public place, but I am sure that the greatest amount of the credit for work done goes to those hidden saints who have thought enough about me to be me up in prayer, that God might keep me from sin and use my testimony for the glory of His name. So let us be content to labor on in the place God has given us.

H. A. Ironside

Contentment & A Rarity in a Materialistic Culture - Harrison, Vine, Ridout

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content (Phil. 4:11). And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content (1 Tim. 6:8). Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb.13:5).

Comments

We live in an age of unprecedented materialistic prosperity. Materialism breeds covetousness. The more we have, the more we want. The more we see what others can afford, the more we grasp after the same things. One of the most striking features of our daily testimony in this kind of age can be the spirit of contentment. Contentment should characterize every Christian because we ought to have learned that material things can never satisfy. We have a hope that stretches out beyond this age into eternity. The spiritual values which are unseen and eternal far outweigh the things which are temporary and seen.

Norman B. Harrison

The secret of contentment is not in circumstances, for they are shifting. It is in Him, for He changes not. It is in the persuasion begotten by God's Word that cannot fail, buttressed by the experimental knowledge that He has stepped in and met our need, that He does care for us

and will unceasingly “supply all our need,” (Phil. 4:19). Such knowledge, such persuasion, is worth more than millions of dollars. It mints itself into the coin of a contented mind. And a contented mind is a priceless possession. Once a poor rich man, walking over his estates, thinking to inspect the progress of his hired man digging a ditch through his land, found him singing away at his work. As he approached he caught the words:

My Father is rich in houses and lands,
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands!
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,
His coffers are full, – He has riches untold.

“John,” said the rich man, “why are you singing such nonsense; you are a poor ditch-digger.”

“Oh, but it’s true,” was the reply. “God is my Father, and He has given me so much for which to sing and praise Him. Yonder is my little cottage and when my day’s work is done, there stands Mary at the door to greet me with a kiss and I sit down to a bountiful meal. Why shouldn’t I sing for joy?”

Then the poor rich man unburdened his heart: “Yonder on the hill is my mansion; but they do not love me up there. They are only waiting for me to die to get my money. John, I wish I had what you have.”

The Gospel of God’s dear Son offers a rich and ever enriching experience of love and providing care. To know that love and prove that care, day by day, just where life’s circumstances find us, this is the privilege of the Christian. It is a life of joy, peace and contentment beyond compare.

Comments

Contentment is a learned characteristic. It certainly does not come naturally for most of us and even as new creatures in Christ, we acquire this spirit through the lessons of life as God allows us to experience the futility of earthly security and gain. How well are we learning this lesson and developing this characteristic? It might be good for all of us to step back and look at our life. Is it a whirlwind of activity because we are so busy accumulating the good things of life? Has our list of necessities for living grown bigger through the years? Do we own more things than ever? Have things which were once luxuries for the rich become essentials in our household?

The "things" of the "good American life" can become so much a part of us without being aware of it. They can rob us of spiritual vitality, of quality time spent in the Word and with God's people. They can really make slaves of us. Our entire life will soon be gone and we will leave nothing behind but "things" that have no eternal value. What would really happen if there would arise a generation that would be willing to live in a self-sacrificial manner, existing only with a minimum amount of the daily needs of life? It is exciting to think of the dynamic contribution such a generation would add to the church. They would go against the tide of materialism and pour their resources into the work of God. They would stand out like shining lights to a world that has found no answers in the materialism of this world.

W. E. Vine

But they that desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts (1 Tim. 6:9).

The word “desire” implies a deliberate grasping after wealth as a dominating object in life. The danger lies in attempting to acquire for one’s own ends more than satisfies one’s needs. There is perhaps a suggestion of various stages in the descent to which the desire leads. To begin with, there is certainly in aiming at the increase of riches a temptation to aim at the acquisition of more, and this carried with it the danger of gaining it by doubtful or unrighteous means, a veritable snare. There is a further snare of being involved in worldly associations. The series now broadens to a variety of foolish and hurtful lusts; foolish because the determination to obtain wealth tends to involve a passionate craving for things undesirable; hurtful because of the injury done not only to the soul but to the body.

Samuel Ridout

Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth (Lk. 12:15).

As we look around us today, we see that covetousness is characteristic of the whole world. The word “covetousness” in the original means “having more”. It is not necessarily wishing for what someone else has, but wishing for more than I have; the root of all covetousness is being dissatisfied with what we already have.

Nothing can fill the heart in this world. If you turn to Ecclesiastes, you will find a man who had everything. He was king; all wealth and power were at his disposal, so

he had only to make known his desire. What effect did all this wealth, knowledge, power, and pleasure have upon him? It filled his mouth with ashes, as it were; it disgusted him with the whole world. He says: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

What will take the care out of our heart, and keep us from discontent? If we realize that we have Him Who is the source of all wealth, the living God as our portion – if He fills the heart, there is no room for covetous desire. If we have Christ – Him in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells – what more can we have?

Delivered From This Present Evil Age

...Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and even. Amen." (Gal. 1:4,5 NKJV)

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we have many, many blessings for which we need to be thankful. Perhaps one of the most important is deliverance from this present evil age. We often fail to comprehend the depths of sin. We need to think often of where we would be were it not for His deliverance. Before regeneration, our wicked hearts were capable of the most hideous sins. Whether it be the drug addict, the staggering drunkard, the prison inmate, the suicide victim in yesterday's paper, we can all say, "but for the grace of God, that could be me."

In Ephesians 4, we are exhorted to "no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk." God is able to deliver us from such a walk. Let us notice six tragic characteristics of the man who walks outside of Christ.

1. It is a walk of futility or vanity. "They walk in the futility or emptiness of their minds" (Eph. 4:17 Amp.). No matter how much of the world's material goods they may accumulate, it is all emptiness. We live in an age and a culture that has demonstrated this fact very clearly. As one of the wealthiest men who ever lived could say, "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (Eccl. 2:11 NKJV).

2. It is a walk of darkness. “Their moral understanding is darkened and their reasoning is beclouded” (Eph. 4:18 Amp.). “Because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God...and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:21, 22 NKJV). We supposedly live in an age of great wisdom and understanding, yet educated men and women are often the most ignorant of the ways of God and His salvation.

3. It is a walk of alienation from the life of God. “They are estranged or self-banished from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18 Amp.). Describing the unregenerate state in a previous chapter, it is stated “at that time you were without Christ...having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12 NKJV). Our society is a godless society, largely forsaking His laws and His precepts. Life is lived as if there were no God and as if we are accountable to no one but ourselves.

4. It is a walk of callousness, spiritual apathy, without any feelings of guilt. “Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Eph. 4:19). Life becomes totally uninhibited. They abandon themselves to unbridled sensuality and every form of impurity. Life becomes characterized by license and greed. Even so today, men want everything they can get and they cannot get enough of it.

5. It is a walk that becomes increasingly corrupt as time goes by. “Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt” (Eph. 4:22 NKJV). Writing about the corruption of our evil nature, Samuel Ridout states, “I tell you, dear brethren, it would make the

heart leap with praise and with joy as we thought of the grace that had snatched us from a corruption which is worse than the punishment for that corruption could possibly be.” Left to himself, man becomes worse and worse until his life becomes so full of sin and corruption that life becomes an existence of untold misery.

6. It is a walk of deception. “He becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion” (Eph. 4:22 Amp.). In 2 Timothy 3:13, we are told that wicked men and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. They reach a point where they tell so many lies about themselves that they begin to believe them.

Those living in this evil age, of which we were a part until God in Christ delivered us, are described in the following manner: They are without excuse. They know God, but they do not glorify Him as God. They are not thankful. They change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man. They are given up by God to uncleanness to dishonor their bodies among themselves. They have exchanged the truth of God for the lie. They worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. This is a partial list of man without God from Romans, chapter one. The list goes on and on in this same chapter. “You have there in Romans one a catalogue of crime which brings the tinge of shame to the cheek even to read it, and it is given, not as some exceptional result of man’s sin, but as the legitimate fruit of his departure from God. It is given in a way that includes every unsaved person.” (Samuel Ridout)

Dear believer, may God help you to fully understand the marvelous deliverance that Christ wrought on your behalf when He delivered you from this evil age. We thank Him and thank Him over and over again. We shall thank Him for all eternity. Except for His deliverance, we would be walking the same path, headed in the same direction, with absolutely no hope for the future. Though we fully deserved His total abandonment, His grace has forgiven us and drawn us to Himself. May we ever walk in this light, walking as children of light, having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, “for it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret” (Eph. 5:11,12 NKJV).

Filled Up With All the Fullness of God

For out of His fullness (abundance) we all received
(John. 1:16)

The story of the feeding of the five thousand is the one miracle of Christ that is recorded in all four Gospels. One of the significant points of the miracle is the proof that it furnishes that Christ is able to give over and above all our needs. Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten" (John. 6:13). Christ gives out of His abundance. His supply never runs out and that which He furnishes is abundantly superior to anything we can get here on earth.

When He spoke to the woman at the well, He said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John. 4:13,14). The water from this world never satisfies. All of its resources can never satisfy the thirsting soul. "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13).

I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But ah! the waters failed!
E'en as I stooped to drink they'd fled,
And mocked me as I wailed.

The younger son journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything, and he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger" (Luke. 15:13-17)! The Lord Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger (John. 6:35).

We are thankful for the freedom that we have in this country, but that freedom fades into insignificance compared to the freedom that Christ gives. Although we might be free from the oppression of the government, we are really slaves to sin. Jesus said, "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John. 8:34). Before we came to Christ, we realized the terrible bondage of sin. It grips us like a vise and binds us in chains. But Christ gives liberty such as this world can never give. "So if the Son liberates you then you are really and unquestionably free" (John. 8:36).

Because Christ is able to give us water to satisfy our thirst forever, because He feeds us to the full to satisfy our eternal hunger, because He liberates us with a liberty that can never be removed, we enjoy in Him life to its abundance. He said, "I came that they (My sheep) may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance—to the full, till it overflows" (John. 10:10).

When each of us examines our life we soon become aware that when Christ forgave us and cleansed us from our sins we experienced the grace of God in its abundance. We continue to experience that grace day

after day in our life. We become aware that His grace is abundant and can never be exhausted. We have learned that "by the one man's offense (Adam) death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance or overflowing of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). Summarizing his own life, Paul stated it in this manner, "Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man,...the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant (beyond measuring), with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 1:13,14).

If His grace has been superabounding so also has been His mercy. Peter, who experienced bitter times of failure in his life, could say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). You and I have sinned so many times that we deserve to be without any hope whatsoever. His boundless mercy enables us to look beyond the hopeless ash heaps of this world to the bright and endless beauties of that eternal hope, made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

How vast, how full, how free,

The mercy of our God!

Proclaim the blessed news around

And spread it all abroad

Blessed, blessed news; Mercy e'en for thee,

Flowing from the heart of God,

So vast, so full, so free!

In his delightful commentary on Ephesians, Bill MacDonald describes the superabundance of God in Christ as found in 3:20. He says "the extent of His ability is seen in the manner in which Paul pyramids words to describe superabundant blessings."

Able

Able to do

Able to do what we ask

Able to do what we think

Able to do what we ask or think

Able to do all that we ask or think

Able to do above all that we ask or think

Able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think

Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think FOR IT PLEASED THE FATHER THAT IN HIM ALL THE FULLNESS SHOULD DWELL...FOR IN HIM DWELLS ALL THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY (Col. 1:19, 2:9).

Hope - A Key Word in the New Testament Epistles

Hope is a keyword in the New Testament epistles and it is one of the keys that opens the door to renewed living in our daily Christian life. We are living in days when despair and fear are becoming more and more an ingredient of daily life. The Christian is very vulnerable to such attacks and the answer is often not in the medicine cabinet but in the hope of the Holy Scriptures. Hope is a word that has to do with the unseen and the future. Faith lays hold of the hope that is revealed in the New Testament.

Marks of a Spiritual Man

In these last days we see so many evidences of the natural man and so few of the spiritual man. It is likely in our generation that the marks of a spiritual man are not clearly understood. Let us examine a few general characteristics and then take a closer look at some specific marks of a spiritual man.

SOME GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

1. The spiritual man places greater importance on his inward state than on his physical condition. He is more concerned about exercising his spirit than exercising his body. He places more importance on his spiritual diet than on his physical diet. "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)

2. The spiritual man understands that adverse circumstances are part of the training of the inward man. He recognizes the eternal value of godly exercise under difficult trials. He sees beyond the immediate hardships and looks ahead to the eternal consequences. "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)

3. The spiritual man places his time and energy in those things which are not seen. He is keenly aware that what is seen is not lasting, but that which is unseen has eternal value. "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)

4. The spiritual man recognizes that spirituality is not attained by the efforts of the natural man. He knows that occupation with Christ through the Holy Spirit produces the evidences and traits of spirituality. He does not struggle with attempts toward self improvement, but he quietly grows and is gradually transformed into the image of Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit in the inward man. "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:17,18)

These spiritual attitudes are essential if we are going to be characterized by any marks or evidences of spirituality. They are attitudes that are in a direct collision course with the worldly attitudes of our age. They can only be produced by the working of the Holy Spirit in our life.

SOME SPECIFIC MARKS OF THE SPIRITUAL MAN

The only completely spiritual man to walk this earth was our Lord Jesus Christ. He was God's perfect man and perfect servant. If we are to understand the traits of the spiritual man, we need to examine those that were manifested by Christ during His ministry. Paul could say, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." (I Cor. 11: 1)

1. The spiritual man manifests a spirit of hunger for the Word of God. The Lord Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4) The Lord Jesus loved the Word of God and practiced it fully in His life. The spiritual man will spend time daily meditating on the

Word of God, allowing it to permeate his thoughts and change his behavior.

2.The spiritual man manifests a spirit of dependency and prayer. It was said of the Lord Jesus, "And it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." (Luke 6:12) The Lord Jesus gave evidence of His total dependency on God by the constancy of His prayer life. The spiritual man will spend much time before God in prayer because he recognizes his continual need for God's strength and wisdom in his daily life.

3.The spiritual man manifests a spirit of humility and obedience. The Lord Jesus was able to say: "For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) The Lord Jesus was able to fulfill His mission completely because He did not come to serve Himself, but He came to give Himself in perfect obedience to the Father. The spiritual man will crucify self and put away the desires of the natural man. If we are occupied with seeking self recognition, then we will not be obedient to the desires of our Heavenly Father. If it is our will to please ourselves, then it cannot be our will to please Him.

4.The spiritual man manifests a spirit of compassion for the lost. It was said of Christ, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matt. 9:36) They rejected Him, but the heart of the Lord Jesus was moved as he saw the lost condition of those about Him. The spiritual man will be moved to weeping as he thinks of the

perishing multitudes who are rushing onward to hell in this pleasure-mad world. When Paul went to Athens, he did not admire the beautiful architecture, the modern advancements, or the latest fashions, but it is written, "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred (grieved) in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." (Acts 17:16)

5. The spiritual man manifests a spirit of forgiveness and longsuffering toward those who have treated him wrongfully. On the cross, after being treated wickedly by those who hated Him, He was able to cry: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) There could not be a greater example of forgiveness and longsuffering displayed anywhere by anyone. The spiritual man will not harbor "hurt" feelings or grudges. He will tolerate untiringly the crude injustices of ignorant, envious, or jealous attackers. In forgiveness, he does not overlook or become indifferent toward sin, but he does not seek to get even with those who have harmed him. A spiritual man can never be careless about sin because he is keenly aware that the holiness of God forbids such an attitude.

6. The spiritual man manifests a spirit of love toward the unlovely. It was said of Christ's love for His disciples, "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." (John 13: 1) The disciples were often not lovely in their thoughts and behavior, but He loved everyone of them to the end. In natural love, we love those to whom we are attracted. In spiritual love, we learn to love those who may be repulsive to us when we first contact them. The spiritual

man will be driven to seek out those who are neglected and even socially ostracized. He will not try to be one of them, but will seek to help them in both a physical and spiritual way.

7.The spiritual man manifests a spirit of endurance and faithfulness. Near the end of His earthly life, the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father: "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." (John 17:4) He was so deeply committed to His Father's will, that He fully completed the work of salvation for which He was sent into the world. The spiritual man is not characterized by short spurts of energy that are soon expended. He is not always starting new projects without completing others. He is committed to the work that God gives him to do.

Upon careful examination of these marks of a spiritual man, as manifested in the life of Christ, most of us must conclude that there is much to be done in our spiritual life. The garden of our inner man has been neglected too much because of the demands of the physical life. The weeds of this world's attitudes have smothered the spiritual fruit that the Spirit of God longs to produce in our life. They have been allowed to grow and grow, while the energy of the Spirit remains dormant and unproductive.

The largest room in the world is the room for improvement.

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. 12:2)

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Our Faithful, Unchangeable Friend

God has always been faithful to His people down through the ages. He was faithful to Abraham, Job, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, and the hosts of Old Testament saints whose stories we love to read.

“Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.” (Deut. 7:9) His faithfulness to the church through its twenty centuries has been astounding. In spite of the persistent attacks of the enemy, the Lord has sustained the church through His unending faithfulness. “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.” (2 Thess. 3:3) There has never been a century since the beginning of time that God has not been praised for His great faithfulness. “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.” (Lam. 3:22,23)

How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend,
Whose love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end.
’Tis Jesus, the First and the Last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We’ll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that’s to come.

We have all experienced that our family, friends, fellow Christians, neighbors, employers and ourselves can often become unfaithful. "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?" (Prov. 20:6) This is one of the many ways that God is unlike man. "God, being who He is, cannot cease to be what He is, and being what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself. He is at once faithful and immutable, so all His words and acts must be and must remain faithful." (A. W. Tozer) "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever, with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations." (Ps. 89:1)

1. Men are often unfaithful because they are disappointed in our response or performance. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13)

2. Men are often unfaithful because they are moody or changeable. "For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed O sons of Jacob". (Mal. 3:6)

3. Men are often unfaithful because they are fearful of the consequences of being faithful. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for The Lord your God is with you wherever you go". (Josh. 1:9)

4. Men are often unfaithful because they forget us and are occupied with other people and other things. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may

forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands....” (Isa. 49:15,16)

5. Men are often unfaithful because they become absorbed in their own personal problems and these problems seem to occupy all their time and energy. “As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust”. (Ps. 103:13,14)

6. Men are often unfaithful because they feel too weak and are without the necessary resources to help us. “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” (1 Pet. 4:19)

7. Men are often unfaithful because they are influenced by others and judge us unworthy of their time and consideration. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:9)

Feeling alone? Feeling forsaken? Remember that our God cannot be likened unto men. He will remain faithful to us, even if all others leave us and forsake us.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is

Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Outside the Camp

Hebrews 13:13

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. (KJV)

Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. (NKJV)

Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. (RSV)

Let us then go forth (from all that would prevent us) to Him outside the camp, (at Calvary), bearing the contempt and abuse and shame (with) Him. (Ampified)

1. What is the camp? It is anything where Christ is in name, not in reality, not enthroned supreme. I care not how ancient the authority may be. It may have all the authority of the law that Judaism claimed for itself; it may have all the antiquity which Rome claims for itself; it may have rules and regulations which appeal to men's judgment as being right and proper; but wherever there is a human organization which displaces Christ, which is not according to the word of God as given us in the New Testament, - above all, wherever Christ is not directly and immediately recognized in absolute control by His Word and Spirit, - there you have the camp. (S. Ridout)

"Inside the veil" and "outside the camp" go together. Necessarily, for the true heavenly tabernacle has been always outside. While Judaism in the strict sense is what is here, yet every legal system comes under it in principle. Properly, there is indeed no real going back to Judaism. No one can reinstate it, or go back where

prophets and holy men of old once were. That is impossible. To bring it back into Christianity was, as the Lord Himself has taught us, to make a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9;

3:9). Of course, we have to remember that people now are brought up in systems of such a character, and that many of the Lord's people are entangled in them. The system, of course, is no less evil for the lapse of centuries. It is rather the reverse. (F.W. Grant)

All earthly religious things are of the flesh, which has been forever rejected of God. Let no man build it up by religious forms, lest it prove his doom. My brother, church "membership" and "Christian service" will not do in Hebrews. "Within the veil....without the camp," describes and almost defines God's saints here. Does it describe you? (W. Newell)

Summary: The city of Jerusalem became to the Jews what the camp was in the wilderness for the Israelites. Although the glory of the presence of God had left the city long ago, they still maintained that God could only be found there. Outwardly, the Jews had changed dramatically since the days of the Judges and the Kings. They no longer practiced idolatry. The temple, although it would be destroyed by the Romans in a few years, was still there. All the outward practices of the Old Testament, and many more added later, were rigorously and daily performed. The ritual was there, but the reality of God's presence was missing. This is religion and the religious world of today is not different. One of the first real signs that the Spirit is working in the heart of a believer is the desire to get out of the religious system of ritualism. One of the first signs of spiritual

decline is the desire to substitute ritualism for the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

2. What does it mean to go forth to Him? It is that which marks our separation. We talk about separating from this and that, and we must separate from many things; but, after all, the whole question of separation is settled for us by one word: we go forth "unto HIM." It is a small matter whether you have left this company of people and associated yourself with that company, but it is everything if you are identified with Christ in His reproach. If we have come outside the camp, we are not thinking so much of what we have left as the One to whom we have come. We go forth unto Him, and it is His presence that marks the separation from everything that is not of Him. (S. Ridout)

It is not without importance to understand that our Lord is here presented, not as the objective channel of the grace we ever need, but as the unrivalled leader and completer of faith in the whole extent of its course. He is viewed as leader and perfecter in the race of faith in its entirety. In a world departed from God the believer's course lies through persecution, detraction, and hatred; and thus he must make his way with endurance or patience. (F. W. Grant)

Summary: The emphasis is not so much on being outside the camp, but rather on going forth to Him. Obviously, the New Testament makes it clear that if we make Him our object and we go forth to Him, then we will be outside the camp. Christ is not accepted in the camp; He was crucified outside the camp (Heb. 13:12). "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you....If I had not done among them the works which

none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father" (Jn. 15:18,24). We cannot be in two places. If we are going forth to Him, then we cannot be accepted in the religious camp.

3. What does it mean to bear His reproach? If there is anyone despised or reproached on earth, it is one openly holding a hope of heaven, yet having no connection with human "religion". Any man or woman who knows the true gospel is in a world where he will bear His reproach. "All that would live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Let it be known that you believe the mere profession of "the Christian religion" to be a delusion, and you will at once find yourself bearing His reproach. The world will not have Christ Himself set before them as their Creator God, as the Redeemer at the cost of His own blood; as their appointed Judge. (W. Newell)

Let us be willing to be accounted the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4:13), not worthy to live, not worthy to die a common death. This was his reproach, and we must submit to it; and we have the more reason because, whether we go forth from this world to Christ or no, we must necessarily go forth in a little time by death; for here we have no continuing city (Heb. 13:14). Sin, sinners, death, will not suffer us to continue long here; and therefore we should go forth now by faith, and seek in Christ the rest and settlement which this world cannot afford us. (M. Henry)

Summary: No one likes being disliked. We naturally strive to be well-liked by as many people as possible. "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and

despised of the people" (Ps. 22:6). This is a position no man desires, yet this was the position of our Lord when He was here on earth. He was the Son, full of favor in heaven and He became the despised One here on earth. We are called upon to share His reproach. Moses greatly valued this place. "By faith Moses...refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,..... esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Heb. 11:24,26). When we have passed from this scene to the next, the applause of this world will no longer be heard and the memory of it will seem fleeting and foolish. When the King finally takes His throne here on earth, what a privilege it will be to have shared a part of His reproach while He was rejected. "These are the names of the mighty men whom David had (in the time of his rejection)" and one by one God lists them all (2 Sam. 23). Will we be among them???

Restraining the Tongue

For we all often stumble and fall and offend in many things. And if any one does not offend in speech (never says the wrong things) he is a fully developed character, able to control his whole body and to curb his entire nature (James 3:2).

From time to time, we receive much needed instruction about the dangers of the teaching of Speaking in Tongues, but we also need to be instructed about the dangers of carelessly speaking in tongues that God has given to all of us. Below is a list of ways that as God's people we can wrongfully employ the tongue.

1. We often flatter people, saying nice things about them which we really do not mean.

This is not only dishonest, but it generally leads us into future problems. "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" (Prov. 29:5). There are times when we have to tell people the truth even if it is not flattering to them. "He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue" (Prov. 28:23). Paul was careful not to use flattery in his reaching out to others with the truth. We do not build others in Christ by flattery. "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness - God is witness" (1 Thess. 2:4,5).

2. More often than we realize, we use the tongue to boast. Boasting is a very subtle thing that can happen

before we realize it. We do something that we think merits the attention of others and we begin to talk about it. "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things" (James 3:5). We not only boast about our past accomplishments, but many times we boast about our future plans. This is as much a manifestation of pride as the former. "But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil" (James 4:16). If flattery is used to appeal to the pride of others, boasting is an act of self-flattery.

3. The tongue too often is engaged in gossip. Many times we do not intend it to be gossip, but our tongue has a way of straying from our original intentions. Whenever we talk about people behind their backs, we are generally engaging in gossip. One of the characteristics of the wicked is described as those "who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their arrows (bitter words), that they may shoot in secret at the blameless" (Ps. 64:3,4). Our tongue can become a sword that pierces others in the back. Many a character has been smudged by careless words spoken by others.

4. All of us have experienced at times the horror of allowing the tongue to take off during a time of anger. We know what it is to give someone a real "tongue lashing". We are really defending our injured pride. "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell...With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, These things ought not to be so. Does a spring

send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? (Ja. 3:6,9-11).

5. Finally, the tongue is often used as a weapon of deceit. We utter many words of hypocrisy with the tongue. We make ourselves sound far more pious than we really are. "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn. 3:18). Peter exhorts us to lay aside all guile and hypocrisy (1 Pet. 2:1). The tongue loves to run ahead of our true heart experiences.

Let us then become increasingly aware of the dangerous potential of the tongue. James says that it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (Ja. 3:8). When we become aware of its evil employment, we can then turn to the Lord for deliverance. Too often we do not recognize the sin of the tongue and thus we do not judge the sin before God. No man can tame the tongue, but God can control it if we ask Him in sincerity. May we daily breathe the prayer of Psalm 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer".

Satan's Dual Objectives: A Worldly Messiah And A Worldly Church

As one examines the New Testament, it becomes evident that Satan had two primary objectives in this world, among many more perhaps less evident. (1) To tempt the Messiah to conform to the image of the worldly Jewish religious thinking of His time. (2) To influence the church so that it conforms to the worldly religious thinking of our times. In the first objective, Satan totally failed. He met an opponent who stood firm. In the second objective, he has met with more success than we would like to think or admit.

I. A Worldly Messiah: Impossible.

From the very beginning of the Lord's ministry, Satan confronted Christ with the object of tempting Him to conform to the religious world that Satan himself had organized. This confrontation was necessary at the very beginning so that "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. 4:1) In both accounts (Matt. 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13), although the order of the three proposals changes, it is evident that Satan's primary objective was to persuade Christ to follow his suggestions. On the surface the suggestions seemed to contain sensible advice. Considering them more carefully, they were self-promoting and worldly. If heeded, the three suggestions would have brought to Christ instantaneous worldly acclaim and acceptance among the religious leaders. "To understand this we must recall what has been said of the state of the Jewish nation, and especially the nature of the Messianic hopes which they were indulging. They expected a Messiah

who would work dazzling wonders and establish a world-wide empire with Jerusalem as its center, and they had postponed the ideas of righteousness and holiness to these [ideas]. They completely inverted the divine conception of the kingdom, which could not but give the spiritual and moral elements precedence over the material and political considerations. Now what Jesus was tempted [by Satan] to do was, in carrying out the great work which His Father had committed to Him, to yield in some measure to these expectations. He must have foreseen that, unless He did so, the nation would be disappointed and probably turn away from Him in unbelief and anger" (James Stalker, Life of Christ). Although it was a decisive struggle and the devil was thoroughly defeated, the devil "departed from Him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). He was not yet ready to admit defeat and he planned to keep on trying until the end.

His subsequent attacks were not long delayed. They were not direct confrontations with the devil himself, but they were nonetheless suggestions that came from Satan's mode of thinking. Many times these suggestions are the most dangerous because we are not aware of their source. Not so with Christ, for He was always aware of all the devices of the devil.

One attack came from his very own family in Galilee. His brothers said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show Yourself to the world." The brothers did not believe in Him and thus we understand the origin of their suggestion. It was a worldly promotion that

motivated their thinking. Christ answered them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." (John 7:2-8). He did not succumb to the darts of His brothers, but He went to Jerusalem later in accordance with His Father's timing and planning.

The attack still continues. This time it comes through His spiritual family..... Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." This was God's plan and Christ's mission on earth. Then Peter took Him aside; he obviously felt he had some wise advice for the Lord. He then actually began to rebuke the Lord. This is quite an act for a mortal man to attempt to correct His Lord. He said to Him, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" Now Peter is suddenly a prophet, a false prophet at that! But the Lord turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Matt. 16:21-23). He directly and correctly identified the mind that was behind the counsel.

Once more our relentless foe attacks. This time he uses the howling mob that has gathered underneath the cross of Calvary. Christ is now not only hungry and thirsty, but He is bleeding and dying. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" The chief priests also, together with the scribes, mocked and said,

"He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." (Mark 15:29-32). Using the same "if clause" that the devil himself used in the wilderness, they said, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matt. 27:40). For a mortal man, with endowed divine power, how tempting it would have been to come down from that cross and spectacularly destroy everyone of His enemies before the eyes of a terrified crowd. But Christ was not a mortal man. He knew His mission and He knew that it had to be finished. If Christ had come down from the cross, it would not have proved that He was the Son of God. It would have proved that He was not the Son of God. It would have demonstrated that He was just a man, a selfish man, interested in saving Himself rather than fulfilling the mission of His heavenly Father. Satan struck his final blow on the Messiah; his opportune times were gone; and the mission of our Lord was carried out according to His Father's plan to the very last detail.

But even after Christ's death, our relentless foe still continues to attack.

II. A Worldly Church: Undesirable The Head of the Church is gone back to heaven but His body is still here on earth. Thus Satan concentrates His attack on those who form His body. Saul learned this truth on the road to Damascus. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And Saul said, "Who are you, Lord?" He recognized the voice speaking from heaven had to be divine, but he had not the least idea Who it could be.

And the Lord said to him, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul was making havoc of the church; he

was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. But he never once laid hands on Jesus of Nazareth. How could he be persecuting Jesus Who was in heaven. In time, he learned the full intent of this statement. When He touched the body on earth, He touched the Head in heaven (Acts 9:4,5). Saul ceased his activity for Satan, and became a disciple of the Lord.

But our relentless foe again continued to attack. Our "adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8). But his most effective attacks take the form of subtlety, seeking to conform the church to the standards of the world rather than obedience to the Word of God. Paul would later write to the church at Corinth, "But I am fearful lest that even as the serpent beguiled Eve by his cunning, so your minds may be seduced from wholehearted and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Thus Satan continues his use of seduction in an attempt to draw the church away from direct obedience to the Lord. And at times, including the present, we have seen evidences in many parts of the world of a church permeated with worldly desires and attitudes. A church that often has been attractive to the world, but powerless in proclaiming the Word of God and its truth.

Those who have experienced working in the local church know and understand the influence that is brought upon them by the world's way of thinking. They understand the temptation that is often confronted to yield in some measure to these suggestions. There is something attractive and easy about many of these methods. It is much easier to say "yes" than to say "no" to them. The suggestions may not be in complete adherence to the Word of God, but they are partly in agreement. They are

appealing, popular suggestions and at times they are even lots of fun. The temptation then takes this form. If we can first win the approval and acceptance of the world, are we not able to later on lead them to the truth? It would be as if Christ would have accepted the Jewish concept of the Messiah, won their confidence, and then later attempted to teach them the righteous, moral, and spiritual concepts of His kingdom. This subtle temptation may even come to the worker through his own immediate family as it did with Christ. Sometimes it's a wife or husband; a daughter or son; a father or mother who raises the question, "Why can't we do this or that? Everybody else does."

"Other times the suggestion comes from our spiritual family. Peter was certainly not aware that he was being used as a tool of Satan. But his thoughts regarding the Messiah were influenced by Satan's way of thinking.

Although they are totally unaware of it, our Christian friends can often be thinking and planning under the influence of this world's teachings. They have developed an attitude that suggests, "if it works for the world, it will work for the church."

There is a temptation "which every worker for God, weary with the slow progress of goodness, must often feel, and to which even good and earnest men have sometimes given way - to begin at the outside instead of within, to get first a great shell of external conformity to religion, and afterwards to fill it with a reality" (Stalker). But it never works. It never has and it never will.

The temptation is strong. Those who adopt the ways of the world seem at times to prosper so much more than those who adhere to the unadulterated Word of God.

Must we give in if we are to succeed. The busy, he has many supporters, but we have on our side the Christ, the Head of the Church, who has overcome all the temptations of the devil. "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (I Jn. 4:4-6). Plod on, Christian worker. don't give in now. The time of reaping is almost here!

Set Your Clock According to Bible Standard Time

We refer to nine different letters in the New Testament where we are reminded of the times in which we live. We need to be diligently aware and constantly reminded of God's viewpoint of time in the days in which we live.

1. It's time to wake up (by William Kelly)

Romans 13:11 – And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

Man slumbers heedless of danger, spite of solemn and reiterated warning. His evil conscience forbids his crediting the grace which is in God; his self-complacency blinds him to the moral beauty of the dependent and obedient Man, as well as to his own need of such a Savior and such a salvation as God urges on him; and so he sleeps on till he perishes, waking up too late to the truth he has rejected and the grace he has slighted irreparably then. The believer with his soul saved already looks for a salvation worthy of Christ and of His redemption at His coming; and though the interval may seem long sometimes, he knows that it is ever growing nearer.

2. The time is short (by J. R. Caldwell)

1 Corinthians 7:29 – But this I say, brethren, the time is short.....

I do not believe that the apostle refers to the period of a man's natural life. It is in prospect of the return of our

Lord that the apostle says that the time is short. In the New Testament we find that the thing in prospect before the minds of the writers is invariably the near approach of the Lord Jesus Christ. In connection with our Feast—the Lord’s Supper—we are to keep it till He come (1 Cor. 11:26). We are continually exhorted to be waiting, looking, and hastening to that hour when the Lord will come and take us to be with Himself. Many have said about this subject that it is not practical. I do not know any subject more practical. Suppose it was known that the Lord was coming tomorrow, what an influence this would have upon our minds and ways.

3. God’s time is now or never (by James Denney)

2 Corinthians 6:2 - Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

What is striking in the passage, and characteristic both of the writer and of the New Testament, is the union of urgency and triumph in the tone. “Now” does certainly mean “now or never”; but more prominently still it means “in a time so graced with opportunity.” The best illustration of it is the saying of Jesus to the Apostles: “Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” (Matt. 13:16,17) Now, that we live under the reign of grace; now, when God’s redeeming love, omnipotent to save, shines on us from the Cross; now, that the last days have come, and the Judge is at the door.

4. Time can be redeemed (by Matthew Henry)

Ephesians 5:16 - Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Redeeming the time is literally, buying the opportunity. It is a metaphor taken from merchants and traders who diligently observe and improve the seasons for merchandise and trade. It is a great part of Christian wisdom to redeem the time. Good Christians must be good husbands of their time, and take care to improve it to the best of purposes, by watching against temptations, by doing good while it is in the power of their hands, and by filling it up with proper employment—one special preservative from sin. They should make the best use they can of the present seasons of grace. Our time is a talent given us by God for some good end, and it is misspent and lost when it is not employed according to His design.

5. Time is an opportunity to reach the lost (by Harry Ironside)

Colossians 4:5 - Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.

We need the grace of decision that will enable us to seize the opportune moment and act upon it in the fear of God. In our intercourse with men of the world how we need to remember that opportunities to warn of judgment to come and to point them to Christ, once given may never come again. Therefore the tremendous importance of buying up such privileges of service in the light of the judgment seat of Christ. The day of grace is fast passing away. We meet men once, perhaps, never to see them again, and while it is perfectly true that we

cannot be forever pestering people about what they would call our religious notions, yet it is the part of wisdom to be on the lookout for every opening to minister Christ.

6. This present time of the church age is a time of apostasy (by W.E. Vine)

1 Timothy 4:1 – Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

In later times, strictly, in times future to that in which the Epistle was written. The phrase, however, seems to cover the whole period of this age. Some shall fall away from the faith, corresponding to our English word apostasy. This is defined in Joshua 22:23 as a turning away from following Jehovah, and in Hebrews 3:12 as falling away from the living God, as Israel did in the wilderness, Acts 7:39-41. The faith is the sum, or body, of Christian doctrine. Departure from it had already begun in the Apostle's time.

7. This present time is a difficult time of great stress and trouble (by C.H. Mackintosh)

2 Timothy 3:1 – But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.

Perilous times are anticipated. A form of godliness without the power; the mantle of profession thrown over the grossest abominations of the human heart; men not able to endure sound doctrine; heaping to themselves teachers after their own lusts, having itching ears which must needs be tickled by the fabulous and baseless absurdities of the human mind. Who can fail to see that

our lot is cast in the very midst of the evils and dangers here contemplated? And is it not well to have a clear perception of these things? Why deceive ourselves with vain dreams of increasing light and spiritual prosperity? Is it not better far to look the true condition of things straight in the face?

8. The rest of our life may be a short time (by F.B. Meyer)

1 Peter 4:2 – That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

The rest of our natural life could be a very short period of time—just a day, a few weeks, or a year. How are we going to spend whatever time remains? “On the one side is the broad way, trodden by so many feet, of indulgence of the flesh. When man fell, appetite broke from the enfeebled grasp of the will, and began to seek after its own gratification. Each one of us is therefore born into the world, subject to the action of appetites which are no longer in the same pure and holy state in which they came from the Creator’s hand, but are biased strongly in the direction of lawless and unholy manifestation. What a glorious contrast to the will of the flesh is the will of God!”

9. Time is ending - the last days have become the last hour (by Griffith Thomas)

1 John 2:18 – Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

The last hour refers “to the period just before the close of the dispensation. The substance of the warning is that antichrist is coming, and not only so, but even now have there arisen many antichrists. This was the proof that it was the last hour. Antichrist is associated with the denial of Jesus as the Messiah, and thereby the denial of the Divine Fatherhood and Sonship. The fact that there were many antichrists shows that there was real danger of false teaching leading to false practice. Perversions of Christianity become opposing forces, the spurious develops into the hostile. When a false conception of religion is in possession, it soon degenerates into undisguised hostility to the true faith”.

No doubt about it. We need to get our clocks set according to God’s standards. We are fast running out of time. Let us seek God’s face and ask Him to awaken us.

Stand Fast

.... we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive (Eph. 4:14)

The Amplified Bible states this same verse we may no longer be children, tossed like ships to and fro between chance gusts of teaching and wavering with every changing wind of doctrine, the prey of the cunning and cleverness of unscrupulous men, gamblers engaged in every shifting form of trickery in inventing errors to mislead." Children are unstable. They are gullible and many times believe every story they are told. In the day and age in which we are living, erroneous" teachings are- running rampant, even among evangelical circles. The Christian who is not well grounded and anchored in the Word of God will be tossed around and will find it increasingly easy to compromise on truths in the Word of God that once held a prominent place in his heart and conscience. It becomes almost an act of humility to think, "If Doctor So and So teaches this, who am I to withstand him?" Six different times in his epistles, Paul warns the Christians to stand fast. Rather than being tossed like ships, we are to be anchored fast to the Word of God. Rather than being blown by the wind, we are to remain steadfast to the truths of Scripture.

1.) Stand Fast In The Faith. Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong (I Cor. 16:13). "The faith" represents the basic teachings of the Gospel and the

Word of God which confirm our personal faith in Christ and our steadfast hope in God's salvation. On these basic principles we must stand firm. There is no room for compromise with those who say they are evangelical, yet teach the doctrines of good works, keeping the sacraments and church membership as meritorious acts - essential for acceptance before God. "Do not consider every point of doctrine an open question. Matters of faith, doctrines for which you have a clear revelation of God, are to be considered settled, and, as among Christians, no longer matters of dispute." (C. Hodge)

The basic doctrines of salvation can never be compromised. They are the pillars of the truth for which we must stand.

2.) Stand Fast In The Liberty Of Christ. Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Gal. 5: 1). In a desperate but human effort to encounter the compromise and careless living of our day and age, some groups have gone to another extreme, introducing legalism into the church. We are creatures of extreme when guided by human wisdom and putting ourselves under a system of law is not the answer to the problems of our day. We have been set free from legal bondage so that we might be free to serve Christ in the Spirit. "The believer now walks in a place that was never known before. He is down here in this world, but he is neither without law, nor yet under law, but is subject to the Lord Jesus Christ, and so is brought into glorious liberty - liberty, of course, not to do the will of the natural man, not to obey the dictates of the flesh, but liberty to glorify God, to adorn the doctrines of Christ by a holy, triumphant life as he passes through this scene.

This is the liberty into which Christ has brought us, and now to go back to some legalistic system such as those prevailing in Christendom today, is to become entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (H. Ironside)

3.) Stand Fast In The Unity Of The Gospel. Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27). God has established a unity in the Church which in Ephesians is referred to as "the unity of the Spirit" and we are exhorted to keep this unity. This passage in Philippians makes it clear how we can stand fast in this unity. It is not by compromising the truth so that we all might seem to believe the same thing. It is not by social activities so that we might appear to be one big, happy family. It is by striving together for the faith of the gospel. The word "striving or contending" is from the Greek word from which we get our English word "athlete". To this is added the word "together". The thought is "of a team, like a football team; or, a regiment of soldiers, who together contend in a desperate struggle. They must have one spirit and one soul and, though there may be many persons, they work together as one. In Zephaniah 3:9 we are exhorted to serve Him with one accord or with one shoulder." (G. Christopher Willis) We have in many cases lost the fellowship of the unity of the Spirit because we have lost the objective of serving together in the defense and propagation of the Gospel.

4. Stand Fast In The Hope Of His Coming. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ... Therefore, my

beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved (Phil. 3:20;4:1). Seeing our citizenship is in heaven and we look for the Savior to come and take us there, "the believing hope and prospect of eternal life should engage us to be steady, even, and constant, in our Christian course." (Matthew Henry) So often we become swallowed up by the responsibilities and temporal gains of our earthly citizenship, that we fail to live for that higher citizenship which will result in much greater glory. As the above verses would indicate, to the beloved Apostle of the Lord, the saints of God were a very special people who had a far greater future than the prospects of this world could possibly equal. To live steadfast in the Christian hope is to live without any stakes driven into this earth. It is to stand fast in an outlook that is marked by the realization that we are only temporary residents of a very temporary scene.

5.) Stand Fast In The Midst Of Tribulation. Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord (I Thess. 3:7,8). "The Thessalonian Christians were firm in their loyalty to the gospel which had been declared unto them; but they were enduring suffering, persecution, and affliction for the sake of the Kingdom of God. To these people Paul wrote; and the letter therefore was one intended to comfort those who were suffering for their loyalty to Christ." (G. Campbell Morgan) It is commendable when Christians are willing to stand firm for the Gospel no matter what kind of reproach they may have to endure. The ridicule of the Gospel message is growing stronger and stronger in our days. It will cost more to be faithful

to the truth of the Gospel message, but we have many examples in past centuries of those who stood firm and faithfully preached the Gospel message in all of its New Testament purity. May we be found among them as the end of this age of grace draws near.

6.) Stand Fast In The Traditions Of Holy Scripture.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle (2 Thess. 2:15). Often we come across articles in our day that criticize so-called "brethren tradition". One cannot be sure exactly what this term includes, but it seems to infer that among the assemblies we are holding truths that are merely traditional and have no Scriptural basis for our present times. Certainly any traditions that do not have any Scriptural basis ought to be carefully examined. On the other hand, we ought not to discard the traditions that we have been taught. Many of them are directly based upon Scriptural teaching and others have come about as a result of carefully examining the Scriptures in times past. In fact, many of these truths were practiced under much personal tribulation. Since the New Testament itself is almost two thousand years old, there is a real sense in which all that we believe is "tradition". The truths that are taught in the New Testament were practiced by the early church and these truths have been passed on century after century by godly teachers who continue to practice them. We do not throw out truths because they are old or because they were taught in the nineteenth century. In fact, we are exhorted here, to stand fast in these traditions and we dare not let them slip away. Without them, we will not be teaching the truths of New Testament antiquity which

form the whole basis of our faith and the foundation of all New Testament church principles.

There is no doubt that we are facing days ahead that will be filled with tremendous changes. As these changes take place, we need special ability and power to stand fast and not be swept away with the current tide of thinking. It has always been true that the Christian must learn to swim against the tide. This is never easy; in fact, it can be agonizing at times. As Paul brings his letter to the Romans to a close, the Spirit of God gives us a tremendous promise in regard to standing fast. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand (Rom. 14:4). The Lord is mighty and He is able to support us and make us stand. The tide is strong, but the Master is stronger - FOR GOD IS ABLE and HE WILL MAKE US STAND. The secret of standing fast is being much on our knees before God. Without Him, we cannot do it.

Standing Steadfast For The Truth Of God

We are living in days when standing for the truth is considered an act of intolerance. Being willing to compromise is considered an act of graciousness. Being loose with the truth is better than standing for the truth. We are clearly instructed in the church letters of the New Testament to stand for the truth. Let us examine the clear instructions.

1. Stand Fast So That We Are Immovable (by J.R. Caldwell)

1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Why does the apostle wind up this magnificent chapter on the resurrection in this manner. Evidently he had counted the cost; he knew that the work of the Lord would bring him reproach and loss; but none of these things moved him, for his hope of recompense was in resurrection. And so he exhorts the saints to go on steadfast in purpose of heart and immovable in their adherence to the truth, knowing that whatever it might cost them, the glorious end in resurrection at the coming of the Lord would abundantly justify their decision. See that lighthouse, far out upon a rocky islet; why is it so securely built? Why such expense and labor to make it as firm as the rock upon which it is founded? Because all the force of the ocean's raging billows will break upon it, and that just at the time when it is most

needed. And even such are the powers that will assail the believer; but the glorious truth of the resurrection is given as an anchor for our souls, both sure and steadfast. As the vessel moored outrides the gale with its stern to the storm, so we, with our eye on that blessed hope, will be kept from drifting, knowing that our reward is sure.

2. Stand Fast So That We Are Free (by G. J. Stewart)

Galatians 5:1 - Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

“This principle is very important; because you will find it is constantly the resource of ignorance to say, Well, we all hold the same thing to a certain degree; the only difference is, that I believe something more than you do. Yes, but that something more is to extinguish faith, and annul the worth of Christ. All this might furnish a plausible platform for human feeling and argument; but the apostle was led of the Holy Spirit to deal with the question of introducing the thinnest wedge of the law. The attempt to add to Christ is in fact to destroy salvation by Christ.” (William Kelly) “We are called then to liberty, and this implies the new nature and its desires, a sort of Christian instinct. It is to do what I want to do as a Christian, not as a natural man. The law demands that a man should do what he neither has the power nor the desire to do, and hence it is a yoke of bondage. Christianity simply directs me in that which the new nature delights in, that is, love and obedience.”

Let us therefore stand fast for the truth that sets us free from legal entanglements that are so often introduced in

a very subtle way by the widespread acceptance today of man's religious concepts.

3. Stand Fast So That We Are Moved By The Truth (by Hamilton Smith)

Ephesians 6:14 - Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

We are to stand with our loins girt about with truth. Spiritually this speaks of the thoughts and affections held in order by the truth. By applying the truth to ourselves, and thus judging all the thoughts and motives of the heart by the truth, we should not only be set free from the inward working of the flesh, but we should have our affections formed according to the truth, and thus have the lowly mind with our affections set on things above. Often we make great efforts to preserve a correct outward demeanor towards one another while, at the same time, careless as to our thoughts and affections. If we are to withstand the wiles of the enemy we must commence by being right inwardly. James warns us that if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. (James 3:14) When the truth holds the affections, strife, bitter envying and other evils of the flesh will be judged, and when they are judged we shall be able to withstand the wiles of the devil in the evil day.

4. Stand Fast So That We Are United In The Truth (by G. Christopher Willis)

Philippians 1:27 - Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast

in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

Those who have the same interest can stand together. If our primary interest is the faith of the gospel, then we have a united cause and we are able to stick together.

“Standing firm is a favorite word of Paul, and has something of a military tone in it: a regiment of soldiers standing firm, and refusing to retreat. Do not give ground an inch! The thought is a regiment of soldiers, who together contend in a desperate struggle. They must have one spirit and one soul and though there may be many persons, they work together as one. In John’s Gospel it is used twice; first of our Lord, in 1:26: There standeth One among you, whom ye know not. What an example of standing firm do we see as we trace the footsteps of the Lord through this world. The second time is in 8:44, where our Lord says to the Jewish leaders: Ye are of your father the devil.... he stood not in the truth. What a contrast! May God help us to follow our Lord, and stand fast. An older brother once said to me that all giving up is of the devil.”

5. Stand Fast So That Our Example Encourages Others (by William MacDonald)

Colossians 2:5 - For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

In the infantry, as the soldiers of one battalion watch the battalion before them, they are encouraged to continue their advance, no matter how fierce the battle, if they see the other battalion moving on ahead without wavering. “This verse shows how intimately aware the

Apostle Paul was of the problems and perils facing the Colossians. He pictures himself as a military officer looking over the assembled troops as they stand ready for inspection. The two words order and steadfastness are military terms. The first describes the orderly array of a company of soldiers, whereas the second pictures the solid flank which is presented by them. Paul rejoices as he sees (in spirit though not in body) how the Colossians were standing true to the Word of God."

6. Stand Fast So That The Traditions Of The New Testament Are Not Exchanged For The Innovations Of Religion (by H.A. Ironside)

2 Thessalonians 2:15 - Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

They were not to let anything turn them aside from the truth which had been proclaimed. Do not misunderstand what the apostle says as to traditions. Paul did not add human traditions to the Word of the Lord; but he had told these Thessalonians certain things by word of mouth, and he urged them to hold fast these teachings, as well as those he committed to them in writing. Today we no longer have inspired apostles proclaiming the Word. We have the Scriptures complete (2 Tim. 3:16). When on earth our Lord told the scribes and Pharisees that they made the Word of God of none effect through their traditions. There are those today who have added a great many human traditions to the Word and have utterly confused their followers. But those who honor the Scriptures need no human traditions. These Thessalonians had listened to the apostle and had also

received his written word, and they were exhorted to stand fast in all that they had received.

7. Stand Fast So That We Can Resist The Devil (by F.B. Meyer)

2 Peter 5:8,9 - Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

There is a terror in the devil's threatenings, which may well strike panic into timid hearts. But we must remember that it is the expending of ineffectual rage. He makes up in noise what he has lost in power. He hates our Shepherd, though he cannot now hurt Him. He did his worst against Him, and failed. He must content himself with bellowing out his hate; though this, too, shall be stayed.

So Rutherford used to say that he preferred dealing with a roaring devil. It fills Satan with redoubled chagrin and malignity to know that the weakest saint is more than a match for him, if he dares to resist him steadfast in the faith, and armed in the panoply of God.

The Abundance of Things

Without a doubt success in this material age in which we live is measured by the abundance of things that one is able to own. The Bible flatly contradicts this outlook and states it very plainly. The Lord Jesus said that we should guard ourselves against the greedy longing to have more; for a man's life does not consist and is not derived from possessing overflowing abundance, or that which is over and above his needs. (Lk. 12:15, Amp. Version) There are many statements in the Bible that warn us about the danger of things. Let us examine seven thought patterns in the Scriptures and pray that God will teach us through His Word to let go of things and not let them possess us.

1. The Worship Of Things. The Lord Jesus stated that the Gentiles wish for and crave and diligently seek after things. (Matt. 6:32, Amp. Version). Gentiles can also be translated "heathen." The heathen worships gods of his own making, not the God of heaven. They are without God in this world. Those who wish for and crave after things are in danger of making them their god and the sole object of their heart.

2. The Preeminence Of Things. Again the Lord Jesus plainly stated that "the craving and passionate desire for other things creep in and choke and suffocate the Word, and it becomes fruitless." (Mk. 4:19, Amp. Version). We get so taken up with things that there is no time or room for the Word of God in our thinking. It seems that the more we have, the less fruitful we are for God.

3. The Conclusion Of Things. Upon addressing the rich man in hell, Abraham told him that in his lifetime he (the

rich man) received his good things. (Lk. 16:25, NKJV). It was as if he said that his entire life was made up of "receiving good things." His life was concluded with this epitaph upon his tombstone "He received his good things." He would have done well to give some of it away before he died. To another rich man, Christ said, "Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." (Lk. 18:22, NKJV).

4. The Brevity Of Things. Somehow we so easily lose sight of the fact that things are not very lasting. We pour so much into them and they last for such a brief period of time. Often we live to see them appear before our very eyes. They are taken from us. We gather and heap up and store for ourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust and worm consume and destroy, and where thieves break through and steal. (Matt. 6:19). If we do not lose them during our lifetime, then we lose all of our things when we die. For we brought no thing into the world, and obviously we cannot take any thing out of the world. (1 Tim. 6:7). It is not surprising that God tells us not to look at the things that are seen because the things that are seen are temporal (brief and fleeting). (2 Cor. 4:18, Amp.Version)

The final three passages teach us what our attitude ought to be regarding things. They are positive statements. They remove us from the wrong track or pattern of thinking, which is conformed to the world's viewpoint, and put us on the right track, transforming us into God's way of thinking about things.

5. Contentment Without Many Things. "Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money-including greed, avarice, lust and craving for

earthly possessions-and be satisfied with your present circumstances and with what you have; for God Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. I will not, I will not, I will not in any degree leave you helpless, nor forsake nor let you down, or relax My hold on you-Assuredly not! (Heb. 13:5, Amp. Version). We really can learn to live without all these things. We have made them such an essential part of our life that we cannot imagine existing without them. God can bring us to the place whereby we can say, "...I have learned how to be content in whatever state I am." (Phil. 4:11). "O man of God, flee from all these things.... if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content." (1 Tim. 6:8, 11)

6. Sharing Things Rather Than Possessing Things. With contentment ought to come the realization that what is given to us in the way of temporal things needs to be shared with others. The things really do not belong to us. They cannot and ought not be grasped with a firm grip, but rather passed on with an open hand. It was said of the believers in the early church that not one of them said that any of the things he possessed was his own. (Acts 4:32). That is a God-given attitude that will never be learned in the world.

7. Things Above Not Things On The Earth. Earthly things will not possess us when we have our mind on things above. We have greater wealth in heaven than we can ever have down here. The problem is that we get short-sighted and we fail to see what we possess in heaven. Set your minds and keep them set on what is above-the higher things-not on the things that are on the earth. (Col. 3:2). The individual who centers his thoughts on his earthly possessions becomes an "earthly

person." His conversation and his manner of living becomes "earthly." The Christian is called to center his thoughts on things above. His conversation and his manner of living become "heavenly." He lives in another world that is not made up of earthly things. It is a better world made up of those things which are lasting and of greater value. Like Abraham, he is "waiting expectantly and confidently, looking forward to the city which has fixed and firm foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God." With this kind of mind, he is prompted by- faith to live as a temporary resident in a strange country until he is taken to his eternal home. (Heb. 11:9, 10). Such a man can live in a tent and, without any feeling of loss, he can watch the city of Sodom and all its possessions burn to ashes.

The real value of a thing is the price it will bring in eternity. John Wesley

The Amazing Sensitivity of Christ

So often the world thinks of a “holy man” as one who segregates himself from the affairs of men and has a very stoic appearance in the midst of the often emotional climate around him. This is certainly a very unrealistic and false viewpoint. The life of the Lord Jesus, the only One who was truly holy, completely contradicts this notion. He never reacted to people or circumstances because He knew beforehand what they were thinking or what was going to happen. On the other hand, He often responded with deep feelings, displaying the innermost depths of His sensitivity toward those around Him.

1. His Compassion. “And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean” (Mk. 1:41). Often, those who spend much time in the midst of sickness and suffering, learn to surround themselves with a shell so that they are not affected by what they see. Many who work in the midst of terminal patients sometimes become cold and indifferent to their suffering in order to survive the daily exposure to this routine. Christ not only saw the suffering around Him, but He understood, as no one else was able, the awful consequences of sin and disease. Yet He never became cold or indifferent toward those sufferers that He saw. In the verse above, His pity reaches out to a leper, who in those days was generally forsaken by the masses. In compassion He reached forth and touched “the untouchable.” It was probably the first human touch this man had experienced in a long, long time.

On another occasion, after spending time in a desert place for privacy, He was mobbed by a multitude of suffering people. Rather than being annoyed, He was moved with compassion toward them (Mk. 6:34). On yet another occasion, as He departed from Jericho, two blind men cried out to Him. Jesus again was moved with compassion and touched their eyes (Mt. 20:34).

These are recorded events. It is beyond our ability to understand how much pity poured out of His heart, every step of His way on this sin-cursed earth. This same Jesus, living in heaven, is still moved with compassion when we cry out for His mercy and His help (Heb. 4:16).

2. His Love. "Then Jesus beholding him loved him....." (Mk. 10:21). Every human being by nature is capable of loving someone other than himself. Generally, our love is contaminated with the selfish elements that make up so much of our response to others. The Lord Jesus expressed His love to others in a manner that would only be capable of One who possessed the divine nature. He loved the rich young man in the verse above, even though He knew that because of his riches, he was going to reject Him and walk away from Him. He loves us all first, even though many never respond to that love (1 Jn. 4:19). He loved His disciples to the end even though they had disappointed Him on many occasions and He fully knew that they were going to forsake Him at the time of His trial and execution (Jn. 13:1). He loves us without receiving anything in return.

The sincerity and purity of His love was also demonstrated when Lazarus was sick. Much of human love, as demonstrated in our present society, exhibits shallowness in the midst of adversity. The Lord Jesus

loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus (Jn. 11:5). Even though He had the power to cure Lazarus of his illness, He allowed Him to die. His love extended beyond the immediate present and its comforts. He was more concerned about their future welfare and He knew this depended on their inner ability to comprehend His victory over death. Divine love permits present adversity to prepare us for the future. Real love always has in mind the future welfare of the recipient (Rom. 8:35).

3. His Anger. "And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts..." (Mk. 3:5) It almost seems disrespectful or irreverent to speak of the Lord Jesus as being angry. We too often think of anger in the sinful sense of a feeling of extreme indignation toward someone because they insulted us, rejected our counsel, or injured us in some way. Yet the word, anger, is used over 200 times in the Old Testament and many of these references refer to the anger of God. In fact, it tells us that He is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11). The Lord Jesus never became angry because He was maltreated by unjust men (1 Pet. 2:23). He became angry when religious leaders hardened their hearts against the truth and power of God. He became angry when they sought, in the hardness of their hearts, to distort the truth and the glory of God. On two occasions, both near the beginning and end of His ministry, He drove the money changers out of the temple (Jn. 2:15; Mk. 11:15). Indifference or acquiescence to the deliberate abuse of God's Word is not a sign of godliness but rather of weakness. It requires courage and fortitude to stand up against those who seek to discredit God's Word and His glory. Christ

often stood alone against the angry mob of religious leaders.

4. His Joy. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit...." (Lk. 10:21) The rejoicing expressed in this verse was in His spirit which is the seat of real joy. It never tells us in the Gospels that Jesus laughed or even smiled. This is not to suggest that He did not smile, but He was never characterized as One who went about laughing and joking. Levity and joking do not harmonize with the character of the "Man of sorrows" who was acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3). As He stood in the presence of those who were grieving at the grave of Lazarus, even though He knew that Lazarus would be raised from the dead, he stood by the mourners and wept with them (Jn. 11:35). There is a vast difference between inward joy and outward levity. Depending on the feelings of those around us, jesting can often be cruel and disturbing. The inner joy of the Spirit is inside the believer and is not necessarily expressed outwardly in a jovial manner. A closer examination of our verse above, shows us that the Lord's joy was expressed by thanksgiving for that which God was doing according to His own delight and pleasure. Thus joy is really the opposite of a murmuring and complaining attitude. It is rather a wholesome thankfulness for all that God is doing in my life and in the life of others. It is expressed by a positive attitude of service to God and to others. It is evidenced by a quiet acceptance of disappointment and adversity. Paul and Silas were not filled with laughter when they were in the stocks in the inner prison at Philippi. Neither did they moan nor complain. Their inner joy was expressed by praying and singing praises to God, and the prisoners heard them (Acts 16:25).

5. His Amazement. "And He marvelled because of their unbelief" (Mk. 6:6). "When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Mt. 8:10). It is hard for us to imagine that the One who brought the world into being could possibly marvel about anything that happened down here. In the above verses there were two attitudes displayed that caused Him to wonder or marvel: the unbelief of those who had seen His miracles and the faith of one Gentile who believed He had the power to do anything He wanted. It is astounding to realize that we can be so full of unbelief that He is filled with amazement or wonder. To His own disciples He had to say: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" (Mt. 17:17) We fail to realize the terrible effect on Him that our unbelief often brings. On the other hand, what a thrill to realize that great faith causes Him to marvel. In the midst of all the unbelief and complaining of our day, there are cries that go up to Him that bring delight to Him. They are shouts of great faith that reach out to the One who is willing and able to do great things for those who believe. What does our life bring forth for Him? Does He marvel at our unbelief or does He marvel at our great faith in Him? "And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was taken away...And NOW I exhort you to be of good cheer;... for there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:22-25).

The Characteristics of a Culture Without God

Every culture has had its opportunities to know God. "What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19,20). Certainly our American society has had countless opportunities to know God. What happens to a country or culture that refuses to acknowledge God? This is carefully explained to us in Romans, Chapter 1. Let us note carefully the characteristics and compare them to events that are taking place around us today.

1. They become futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts are darkened (v.21). Becoming godless in their thinking, they engage in foolish and stupid speculations and their minds are filled with darkness.
2. Professing to be wise, they become fools (v.22). Claiming to be smart, they actually arrive at stupid conclusions.
3. They change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man (v.23). Their image of God resembles mortal man. This image may not necessarily be a physical and visible image. It might be an image in their thoughts expressed in their writings, cartoons, jokes, and movies.

4. They exchange the truth of God for a lie (v.25). They would sooner believe the prefabrications of men than accept the truth of God.

5. They worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator (v.25). They glorify their fellow-men but refuse to glorify the God of heaven. Men may be extolled in their public gatherings, but it is unlawful to even mention the name of God.

6. They have been given over to vile passions. Women practice what is against nature. The men with men, commit what is shameful (vv.26,27). Homosexuality becomes widespread to the point that it is accepted as an alternative lifestyle even though it is obviously against the normal practices of nature all around us.

7. They do those things which are not fitting (v.28). The things they do are really abhorrent, repulsive, and disgusting.

8. And then comes a long list of other evil practices. It is a dark list of twenty-three indictments. They range from charges that could result in death sentences, such as murder (v.29) to charges that many would label as commendable, such as boasters and inventors of evil things (v.30). The list includes sins of corruption, which are outwardly manifested, such as sexual immorality (v. 29), disobedience to parents (v.30), and unmerciful (v. 31). They also include sins of the heart that only God can see, but yet they are sins that eventually produce tragic and painful consequences. These are sins such as covetousness, maliciousness, envy, strife, deceit (v.29), backbiters, haters of God, proud (v.30), untrustworthy, unloving and unforgiving (v.31). The list reminds us of the days before the flood, when it was stated that the

"Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

As we look around us, we are enabled to see that our culture is rapidly taking on these characteristics. Only a fool, who buries his head in the sand like an ostrich, can fail to see the deterioration of our godless society. It cannot be approved and it certainly cannot be overlooked. The greatest condemnation of the whole list appears at the end of the chapter when it states, "who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them" (v. 32). Neither can our culture be changed or improved. It is a mistake for the church to involve itself in reform movements because we cannot reform a society that has turned away from God's light and is under the judgment of God.

Rather verses 15 and 16 give us the key to our responsibility. The Gospel, which calls men and women out of this world to be citizens of another world, is the power of God which brings salvation to a condemned world. "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel....for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."

The Death of Christ - An Act of Divine Manifestation

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ...whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

God revealed His absolute righteousness through the death of Jesus Christ. He demonstrated clearly that sin must be righteously judged before there could be forgiveness. The natural mind does not understand this aspect of God's character without the death of Christ. By nature, we like to assume that if we try to do our very best (which, by the way, we never really do), God in His kindness will overlook our "failures." In thinking this way, we totally overlook the righteous and holy character of God. We are assuming that God will compromise His righteousness in order to demonstrate His love. This He can never do. Love that is not founded on the basis of righteousness is worthless.

Through His death on the cross, Christ satisfied the righteous and holy demands of God regarding our "sins." The popular teaching today of God's tolerance of evil is a slander against His character as the righteous Judge of this universe. It is only by teaching without compromise the necessity of the death of Christ on

behalf of sinners that we properly demonstrate the true character of God. A “god” who overlooks sin and does not judge it is but an “idol” made up by the imagination of man. The true God must rightly judge every sin ever committed and in the death of Christ, He has done this for everyone who believes.

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. (1 John 4:9) Because of sin, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” (Romans 1:18) We see the consequences of sin all around us: death, disease, pain, sorrow, conflict, war, calamities and other disasters. Rather than recognizing these consequences to be the results of our own rebellion and disobedience, the natural man tends to attribute them to the angry nature of God. Thus they conceive of God as a Being who enjoys bringing vengeance on those who do not seek to appease him. We then begin to understand all the acts of atrocity that men have performed before the altars and images of their angry “gods” who are the concept of their own imagination.

All these great sorrows that come upon this world are not evidences that God does not love us. Rather they are evidences that man is living in rebellion against His Maker and that man has turned the world upside down in his proud attempt to do things his own way in contradiction to the ways of God.

Can we know then that God truly loves us? We not only can, but we ought to know because the death of Christ proves His love beyond any doubt. In the above passage we understand that God manifested or displayed His

love to us when He sent His only begotten Son into the world. By sending Him, we understand from John 3:16 that He gave Him. The purpose of His mission to the world was to give Himself for our sins.

In giving His Son, God was giving the dearest and most precious possession that He had. He was His only begotten Son, the Son of His love. God was willing to give His very best that we might be saved from the consequences of our sin. This demonstrates a most crucial point about the true message of the Bible and the manifestation of true Christianity. Religions which believe that God is hateful and revengeful seek to exercise their religious zeal by hating, killing, imprisoning, and destroying their opponents. The true Christian reaches out in love and is willing to give himself if necessary to spread the news of God's love to those who are in rebellion against him. Saul of Tarsus is an illustration of this point. When he was governed by religion, he sought to persecute and to kill his opponents (Acts 26:11). When he was converted to Christ, in love he gave his life to advance the Gospel of Christ to the heathen world about him (2 Cor. 4:11; 5:14).

The Death of Christ - An Act of Immeasurable Suffering

They (the prophets) sought to find out what or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. (1 Peter 1:11)

Although there was much the prophets did not understand about Christ's death, they did understand that the Messiah would suffer as none ever suffered before and they bore testimony to this fact in their writings. Isaiah spoke of His death as a slaughter, "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7). In describing His sufferings through David, the Suffering One says, "all my bones are out of joint...my strength is dried up like a fragment of clay pottery...my tongue clings to my jaws...they pierced my hands and my feet (Psalm 22:14-16).

It was also testified that Christ had to suffer first before He should enter into His glory. The sufferings had to precede the glories that would follow. Many of the prophets also speak of His coming millennial glory when He shall reign as King upon this earth. If His reign is going to be a manifestation of great glory, then it is evident that His death was a manifestation of great suffering. If the manifestation of Christ on earth will result in blazing glory from heaven as "the Sun of Righteousness will arise" (Malachi 4:2); so the sufferings for sin brought forth the greatest darkness ever manifested by heaven, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1)

Joseph is a beautiful picture of Christ in this manner. He suffered deeply before he entered into his glory.

...Christ also suffered for us...; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree.... (1 Peter 2:20-25)

It is not surprising that Peter should mention often the sufferings of Christ. He saw Him suffering and was undoubtedly moved by what he saw. While Christ was here on earth before He went to the cross, Peter had been an eyewitness of Christ's majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration. (2 Peter 1:16) He obviously never forgot this sight, but he also never forgot His sufferings. In the above passage, there are at least five amazing facts we learn about His suffering.

1. He suffered in an exemplary manner. (vs.20, 21) The manner in which He conducted Himself under intense suffering becomes a model to all Christians who must suffer for His Name's sake.
2. He suffered submissively. (v.23) Although He was unjustly arrested and afflicted, He committed Himself to God who judges righteously.
3. He suffered vicariously. (v.24) He did not suffer for His own sins, but He bore our sins.
4. He suffered voluntarily. (v.24) He Himself bore our sins. He voluntarily took our guilt upon Himself.
5. He suffered with a purpose. (v.25) We were like sheep going astray, but through His suffering we have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him

the iniquity of us all.” (Isa. 53:6) Deeply moved by this Suffering One in Isaiah 53, the Ethiopian eunuch turned to Philip and begged him to tell him of whom the prophet was speaking. Beginning with this portion of Scripture, Philip preached Jesus to him (Acts 8:32-35).

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.... (1 Peter 3:18) As Peter further defines the sufferings of Christ, three fundamental truths are stated about His death that can never be altered.

1. He suffered once for sins. His sufferings never had to be repeated or added to. They were sufficient to pay the penalty of our sins forever. “He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” (Hebrews 9:26)

2. He suffered the just for the unjust. He took the place of the rebellious and guilty sinner when He suffered on the cross. “He (God) made Him who knew no sin (the just one) to be sin for us (the unjust).” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

3. He suffered that He might bring us to God. Obviously the gulf between us and God could never have been crossed unless He suffered first for our sins on the cross.

I saw One hanging on a tree, in agony and blood; He fixed His loving eyes on me, as near His cross I stood.

O, can it be, upon a tree, the Savior died for me?

My soul is thrilled, my heart is filled, to think He died for me!

(John Newton)

The Death of Christ was an Act of Gracious Deliverance

We typically like to help those who are appealing to us in some way or other. When we do help someone who is in trouble, we often have preconceived expectations. We expect the person to appreciate what we have done and to thank us for it. We also expect the person to eventually exert some effort of his own to bring about his recovery. We might even expect the person to help us in times of distress.

It is astounding that Christ did not die for us for any of the above reasons. God's kindness to us was not motivated by any such human rationalization. It was rather a divine act of pure love to those who would never be deserving of His deliverance that He achieved through the sacrifice of His Beloved Son.

"And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God." (Luke 23:35) "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." (Luke 23:39)

The reaction of the crowd, the rulers, and the thief hanging next to Him represents the opinion of all mankind as they look upon the cross. The death of Christ is not looked upon with appreciation by the natural man. We consider it an act of weakness rather than an act of deliverance for the human race. The thought that anyone should have to die as our substitute is an insult to our pride and our warped concept of

justice. We would go so far as to say that it never should have happened and it was a most unfortunate miscarriage of justice. This means then that Christ died for those who were most ungrateful. He died for multitudes that would live and die, yet would never thank Him for what He did.

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” (Rom. 5:6) While we were without the power or ability to help ourselves, Christ died for us. We were far away from God and we had no possible means of being able to bring ourselves back to Him. We were as sheep who had gone astray because we deliberately turned to our own way. (Isa. 53:6) We were responsible for going astray but, like sheep, incapable of finding our way back. Christ said He “came to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10) When the shepherd found the lost sheep, he laid it on his shoulders and brought it home. (Luke 15:5,6) The sheep was in no way able to get itself home, and neither were we.

The absolute helplessness of the sinner is also illustrated in the parable of the good Samaritan. As he journeyed, he “came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds...and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” (Luke 10:33,34)

“Now it is an extraordinary thing for one to give his life even for an upright man, though perhaps for a noble and lovable and generous benefactor someone might even dare to die. But God clearly proves His own love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ died

for us.” (Rom. 5:7,8 Amp.) There was no reason within ourselves for God to love us and to give His Son to die for us.

In the conversion of Paul, an apostle of Christ, we have the example of how Christ died for the chief of sinners. Before he was saved he:

- was binding and delivering into prisons both men and women who belonged to Christ (Acts 22:4)
- tried to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus (Acts 26:9)
- voted to put Christians to death (Acts 26:10)
- compelled Christians to blaspheme being exceedingly enraged against them (Acts 26:11)
- tried to destroy the church of God (Gal. 1:13)
- was aggressively insulting to Christ (1 Tim. 1:13)

He had many counts against him, yet Christ saved him and he became a pattern of God’s longsuffering to sinners. (1 Tim. 1:15,16)

“Thanks be to God for His unspeakable (indescribable) gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15) When God gave His Son to die on the cross, He gave a gift that was beyond telling, indescribable. It was motivated by the greatest love that has ever existed.

“For God so loved the world that He gave

His only begotten Son.” (John 3:16) The cost was the greatest of any gift that was ever given. The gift has the greatest worth of any gift ever received.

The Death of Christ Was an Act of Unparalleled Humility

It was an astounding act of humility that the Eternal Son, Creator of the Universe, the Everlasting God, should become a man, born as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem. But He stooped even lower than this. It was even more amazing that in His humility He actually took the place of a servant while He was here on earth. But He stooped even lower than this. The very depth of His humility was demonstrated when He submitted to death, even the death of the cross.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8).

The cross represented the lowest step of humility. The cross was a place where they put criminals or transgressors of the law. "There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death" (Luke 23:32). Jesus Christ was obviously not a criminal for He is the only man who ever lived who never committed any sins. "...Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:21,22). Upon hanging on the cross, He took the place of a curse. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree)" (Galatians 3:13). This act of dying on the cross was carried out by our Lord Jesus Christ because it was the will of God His Father. Without Christ's death on the cross, God's marvelous plan of redemption could never have been fulfilled.

So Christ was willing to take the lowest place possible in order to accomplish His Father's will. This is the opposite way of sinful human beings. We not only want our own way, rather than God's, but our own way is seeking to exalt ourselves to the highest station possible. We want to be recognized for our high achievements and we seek the applause of men. We seek our own will which is always the way of self-achievement and greatness. This is always accomplished by the defeat or destruction of others. Christ took the lowest place which was for the salvation of others.

In the creation of man, God designed that man, the highest order of his earthly creation, should govern this universe. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all under his feet, all sheep and oxen, even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas (Psalm 8:3-8). Yet man disobeyed God and was lifted up in pride. The whole history of mankind demonstrates one man after another trying to elevate himself to be the master ruler of this universe, but he completely fails. No man has ever been able to subdue and control this universe. He has brought nothing but death, disaster, and disease upon all of mankind. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for

Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:9,10). By stooping to the obedience of death on the cross He has achieved God’s purposes for this sinful earth. Through death He has won the mightiest victory for mankind that has ever or will ever be achieved—victory over death itself.

The Eternal Existence, Work, and Reign of Christ

THE ETERNAL EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

If man was not so deeply enclosed in darkness his inquisitive mind would be intrigued by the thought that there was a Man who lived on this earth who pre-existed. Today the makers of science fiction novels and movies create fictional characters of mystical origins. The response to these fictional portrayals are both enthusiastic and lucrative. Yet in the realm of truth, the only true story of a real Man who pre-existed prior to His birth is largely ignored or ridiculed.

John the Baptist became acquainted with Jesus Christ in the early days of His earthly ministry. Upon first meeting Him, John admits that he did not know Him (John 1:33). In the New Testament account, John's mother, Elizabeth, was a relative of the mother of Jesus. Mary visited John's mother while they were both expectant mothers (Luke 1:30-41). Mary remained with her about three months, and then returned home. Elizabeth's full time came and she gave birth to John (Luke 1:56,57). She delivered her child about six months before Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ (Luke 1:36). Therefore, John was older than Jesus.

Yet

John bore witness of Christ and cried out saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after Me is preferred before me, for He was before me'" (John 1:15). As John came to know Him and to learn about Him, he was convinced that Jesus Christ existed before He came into this world.

This same truth was also revealed to John, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. In writing about Jesus, John referred to Him as the Word. Just as we reveal ourselves to others through words, so Christ reveals God to us. John said that the Word (Christ) became flesh (human) and lived among us, and we actually saw His glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father (John 1:14). He states that He became flesh, verifying that He existed before He became a Man. For this reason, He stated earlier, "He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2).

There is further evidence of Christ's eternal existence before He ever came into this world. "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth.....All things were created through Him and for Him. And He existed before all things, and in Him all things are held together" (Colossians 1:16,17). He not only existed before He came into this world, but He made this world (John 1:10). The very first verse in the Bible declares, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Thus we must conclude that this pre-existing One who was born in the manger at Bethlehem is God, the very God, who before the appearance of Christ was not seen by human eyes. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him or brought Him out where He can be seen" (John 1:18). "He is the image (the exact likeness) of the unseen God (the visible representation of the invisible)" (Colossians 1:15).

THE ETERNAL WORK OF CHRIST

Just prior to Christ's death, He cried out on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). There are two questions that arise upon hearing this victorious cry:

1. What was finished? How could anyone, with His hands and feet fastened to a cross, finish anything. In anticipation of His death on the cross, Jesus Christ was able to say to His Father as He prayed to Him, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given Me to do" (John 17:4). As He looked ahead to the final hours of His life, He saw Himself as having completed all that the Father gave Him to do while here on earth. What was the special assignment that was given to Him by the Father that He was about to finish in the final hours of His life?

"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things,....but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:18-20). It is made clear, that the eternal Son of God, before this world was made, was destined to be the Lamb of God when He came to this earth. God sent Him for this express purpose and He finished the redemptive work of God for sinful man when He gave His life for us on the cross.

2. For how long is this work finished? Let us suppose that a man has been painting his house for the past three weeks. One glorious day he makes the last stroke with his paint brush, gets down off the ladder, runs into the house, and proclaims in a loud voice, "It is finished." It is surely a triumphant day, but we all know that five to ten years later, he will need to pick up his brush, can of

paint, and ladder and go out and paint that same house all over again. Prior to the cross of Calvary, sacrifices were never finished. They had to be repeated over and over again. "But this Man (Jesus Christ), after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). He had offered a single Sacrifice for our sins that will avail for all time and eternity. He was able to sit down because the work of salvation was totally and completely finished.

There are many today who seem to think that Christ started the work of salvation and now it is our responsibility to maintain and add to the work He completed. Let us look "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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

"Wherever the believer looks, back upon his guilty past, he sees it blotted out by the precious blood of Christ; if he looks forward to the eternal glory, he sees it secured for him by that precious blood; if he looks within himself, poor, failing, feeble as he is, he can say that the very blood which is upon the throne of God is upon me also and is pledged to bring me into that place of eternal blessedness." (Samuel Ridout) At the beginning and the end of the last book of the Bible, Jesus Christ declares Himself to be the starter and the finisher of our salvation. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord (Revelation 1:8). "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last (the Before all and the End of all) (Revelation 22:13). It can be said of the Lord Jesus that He never starts anything that He does not finish. He has finished to the end the work of

salvation. For me to try to add anything to that work is an insult to the throne of God. To suggest that I could do anything more is a form of foolish pride and a failure to see the worth of the work that was accomplished by His death on the cross.

When He, from His lofty throne, Stooped to do and die,
Ev'ry thing was fully done; Harken to His cry!

"It is finished" yes, indeed, Finished ev'ry jot;

Sinner, this is all you need, Tell me, is it not?

(J. Proctor)

THE ETERNAL REIGN OF CHRIST

Nathan brought these words from the Lord to David, "He (David) shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:13). Again the Lord said to David, And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

The casual reader of the Old Testament would assume that this promise was never fulfilled. Many years after David, the kingdom fell. Concerning one of his last descendants to sit on the throne, Jeremiah said, "Write this man down as childless; a man who shall not prosper in his days; for no man of his offspring shall succeed in sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (Jeremiah 22:30). For centuries now, no one has sat upon the throne of David.

Yet God through the centuries preserved the royal seed of David. Jesus Christ was born into the world, of Whom Isaiah prophesied, "Of the increase of His government

and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isaiah 9:7).

When the New Testament account begins, first of all, it gives the full lineage of Christ through the line of David, pronouncing in the very first verse, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David..." (Matthew 1:1). Paul carefully states in Romans 1:3, "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh". It was essential that Christ should be born of the seed of David, because God, who never lies, promised David that his throne would be forever and that promise would be fulfilled by His Son sitting upon that throne.

Yet it appeared, when Jesus Christ was crucified, that the promise failed a second time. In Revelation 12, we read that the woman bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. The dragon, who was Satan, stood before the woman, ready to devour the Child. It appeared that he had been successful and David's throne was again threatened by extinction.

God never lies; He made a promise. At this point, the most triumphant victory in all the history of time and eternity occurred. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead!! In the great resurrection chapter (1 Corinthians 15), one of the reasons given for His resurrection is: For He (Christ) must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet (15:25).

God addresses His Son in this manner: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom" (Hebrews 1:8). We now

learn that God has future plans for the throne of David through His Son. He is coming back to this earth to reign forever and His reign will be a reign of righteousness. All the other kingdoms of this world have been temporary and unrighteous. And thus, as the great clock of prophecy strikes its final hours, Jesus Christ will return to this scene wherein the whole creation groans and labors under the travail and tragedy of the wicked rule of ungodly rulers. When this scene occurs, there will be mighty voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and HE shall reign forever and ever (for the eternities of the eternities!)" (Revelation 11:15)

Every king who has ever reigned received His kingdom from God. Nebuchadnezzar had to learn this lesson (Daniel 2:21). God also removes kings because in their wickedness, they forget God. Wickedness and corruption brings an end to their reign. Although many wicked rulers defy God and seek to establish an invincible kingdom, they are eventually subdued. They see themselves as great powers whom no one can touch, and they laugh at God, independently seeking to bring everyone to their knees. None has ever succeeded.

There is an astounding narration that accompanies the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will succeed!! "Then comes the end....when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24). He will accomplish that which has never been done before. But when He accomplishes it, He delivers the kingdom over to God the Father. The Father has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet. However, when everything is subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also subject Himself to the Father Who put

all things under Him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:27,28). Christ sits upon an eternal throne, established forever and ever, but He sits upon it in complete subjection to His Father. He reigns supreme, but He reigns in subjection. Blessed be His Name! There never was and there never will be anyone to compare to our Lord Jesus Christ. "Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

The Family of God

Our Entrance into the Family of God

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).

Man in his natural wisdom rationalizes that we are all members of the same family, the human family, when we are born into this world. The Word of God makes it emphatically clear that by nature we are

The God of Abraham

Just completing a careful study of the life of Abraham in Genesis, the student sat back in his chair, looked at his carefully prepared notes, and asked himself, "What do you think of Abraham now?" He thought for a long time, and then answered, "My opinion of Abraham has not changed very much. He's nothing but a man as he himself stated, 'I who am but dust and ashes.' (Gen. 18:27) But now I am filled with wonder as I think of the God of Abraham. He's the One Who made and shaped Abraham who 'by faith, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.' (Heb. 11:17) Only God could so mold and shape a man that he could reach such a state of submission to God. Thus I am filled with wonder as I reflect upon His patience, His power, His longsuffering, His wisdom, His love, all of which were poured out on Abraham to make Him into a vessel fit for God to use." Doubtless, this student's observation has much to say to us in this day. We make too much of the man, too much of the servant, and not enough of the God who made the servant into His vessel. "We are very much disposed to reason upward, from ourselves to God, instead of downward, from God to us." David could say, "O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, You who set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and infants You have ordained strength, "What is man.? You have made him, You have crowned him, You have made him, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8)

Years after Abraham's death, God appeared to his son, Isaac, and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you." (Gen. 26:24) These words should have provided Isaac with the greatest consolation. The life of Abraham clearly demonstrates, as no other man before him, the blessing of God's presence in our life down here on earth. Let us examine the steps in Abraham's life and note the vitality of God's presence in each of these steps.

1. In the Beginning God (Gen. 1:1). God is the beginning of every person who has ever developed into a vessel for God. Without God's initial intervention, Abraham would have remained Abram of the Chaldees, an idolatrous, wicked, and uneventful man who would now be forgotten in the annals of history along with all his other contemporaries of that land. "Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods." (Josh. 24:2) "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia." (Acts 7:2) "Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called these He also justified." (Rom. 8:30)

O Master, when Thou callest, No heart may dare refuse;
Tis honor, highest honor, When Thou dost deign to use
Our brightest and our fairest, Our dearest, all are Thine;
Thou Who for each one carest, We hail Thy love's design.

2. The God of Patience (Rom. 15:5). In the beginnings of every man used of God, progress moves very slowly. Whether we think of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, or others, God's patience was especially

displayed in the days of their early training, although certainly His patience was needed every step of the way. Abraham delayed his calling by lingering in Haran. But God patiently waited. Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and DWELT in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, HE (God) moved him to this land in which you now dwell.” (Acts 7:4) In this same chapter, Genesis 12, Abraham went down into Egypt to escape the famine. God miraculously preserved him from harm during his foolish departure and patiently waited for him to return. “Then Abram went up from Egypt;to the place where his tent had been at the beginning;to the place of the alter which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD.” (Gen. 13:1-4)

O Master, let me walk with Thee in lowly paths of service free;

Tell me Thy secret; help me bear the strain of toil, the fret of care.

Teach me Thy patience! still with Thee in closer, dearer company, In work that keeps faith sweet and strong, in trust that triumphs over wrong.

3. The Almighty God – El Shaddai (Gen. 17:1). In a number of subsequent events we learn how God fully convinced Abraham that what He had promised HE WAS ALSO ABLE TO PERFORM. (Rom. 4:21) He gave to Abraham the strength of humility in the conflict between his herdsmen and Lot’s. (Gen. 13) Allowing Lot to have first choice he discovered that strength which comes to those who wait upon God for directions. God gave to Abraham the strength for conquest. (Gen. 14). He delivered Lot from a confederation of kings far superior

to the number of his own men. He learned the strength that comes to those who seek to unselfishly help others, even if they do not deserve help or will not be grateful for the help. In this same chapter Abraham was also given moral strength to refuse the riches of the king of Sodom. He learned the strength that comes to one who looks to God and not to man for his reward. After attempting by his own strength through natural means to fulfill God's promise of an heir, Abraham learned about strength that comes through supernatural ways rather than being provided by the ways of nature. (Gen. 16, 17) He learned the strength of dependence upon God.

Day by day and with each passing moment, strength I find to meet my trials here; trusting in my Father's wise bestowment, I've no cause for worry or for fear."

4. The God of Fellowship – God is Light (1 Jn. 1:1-7). As we turn the pages of Abraham's life to chapters 18 and 19, we begin to feel the close relationship that had grown between God and Abraham. We were told previously that Abraham "believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." (Gen. 15:6) On this basis, God approached Abraham in an intimate way and we become aware how much God desires to share of Himself with man. In chapter 18, God actually appeared to Abraham in human form at the door of his tent. In the heat of the day, while Abraham was seated, all human activity had ceased, God made His appearance. It is difficult for God to manifest Himself, even through the Scriptures as He does today, to those who are so busy with the activities of the day that their minds and hearts are deeply engrossed with their own personal interests. On this visit, God revealed to Abraham His plans

regarding Abraham's heir and also His plans regarding the wicked city of Sodom. We discover that Abraham learned from God things that He would never have learned anywhere else.

C. H. Mackintosh comments, "Had Abraham visited Sodom in order to obtain information about its facts, had he applied to some of its leading intelligent men, to know what they thought of Sodom's present condition and future prospects, how would he have been answered? Doubtless, they would have called his attention to their agricultural and architectural schemes, the vast resources of the country; they would have placed before his eyes one vast, mingled scene of buying and selling, building and planting, eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage. Doubtless, too, they would never dream of judgment, and if anyone had made mention thereof, their mouths would have been filled with infidel laughter. Hence, then, it is plain that Sodom was not the place in which to learn about Sodom's end. No; the place where Abraham stood before the Lord, afforded the only proper point from whence to take in the whole prospect. THERE, IN THE CLEARNESS AND CALMNESS OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE, HE COULD UNDERSTAND IT ALL."

Although it is not mentioned in Genesis, other writers recognized that Abraham had become "The Friend of God", a title that fills our hearts with wonder and amazement. King Jehoshaphat, as He prayed to God, called Abraham, "Your friend forever". (2 Chr. 20:7) God Himself addressed the children of Israel as "the descendants of Abraham My friend." (Isa. 41:8) Centuries later, James stated that he was called the friend of God. (Ja. 2:23) "What is man that You are

mindful of him (that your mind is full of him), and the son of man that You visit him?" (Ps.8:4)

"He speaks, and the sound of His voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing, and the melody that He gave to me, within my heart is singing."

"And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own, And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known."

5. Jehovah - Jireh; The Lord Will Provide (Gen. 22:14). Finishing our praise of the God of Abraham, let us note this special title of Jehovah that became a real experience to Abraham in his life. In a real and special way in his later years, Abraham learned that God's resources for His own were without limitations. In Chapter 21 God provided the long awaited heir through his wife, Sarah, even though her womb was dead. (Rom. 4:19) In Chapter 22, he provided the ram for a burnt offering, just when Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. (22:10-14) In Chapter 23, God provided a burial place for his beloved wife, Sarah. In Chapter 24, God provided a bride for his son, Isaac. In Chapter 25, God provided him with an eternal home, gathered to his people, "for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11:10) "And my God shall supply ALL YOUR NEED according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19) After years of dependence on God's provisions as a missionary in China, Hudson Taylor said, "Depend upon it, God's work done in God's way, will never lack God's supplies."

The whole triumphant host give thanks to God on high;
Hail, Father, Son and Holy Ghost! They ever cry,

Hail, Abraham's God and mine! I join the heav'nly lays;
All might and majesty are THINE, and endless praise.
Amen.

The Leaven of False Doctrine

Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. 2 Pet. 3:17

THE COMPOSITION OF LEAVEN

Leaven was an agent that was used to bring about fermentation in mixtures of dough in order to make it rise. The Israelites were ordered to put all leaven out of their houses during the Passover (Ex. 12:19; Deut. 16:3,4). Under the Old Testament order of worship, leaven was forbidden in all offerings made by fire to the Lord (Ex. 34:25; Lev. 2:11). Thus early in Scripture, through this symbol of leaven, we learn that there is an agent at work in this world which is an evil or wicked influence that has no place among the people of God. By its very substance, it symbolizes the danger of corruption and pride among the people of God. Just as leaven changes the original form of the dough, so it pictures morally that wicked agency at work in the world to corrupt or change the original form of absolute truth that has been spoken or revealed by God. Because leaven causes the dough to rise or to be puffed up, it pictures man being puffed up over his own acquired knowledge to the extent that he rejects the revealed truth that has been spoken by God (Col. 2:18). Thus, man has sought to change or corrupt God's truth, as Paul explained to the Galatian church, when he said, "there be some that trouble you, and would pervert (distort) the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7). Lifted up in pride, human wisdom has failed to consider the truth or revelation of God. "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe (the religious scholar)? Where is the disputer (the

logician or debater) of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:20,21). With all its earthly wisdom, the world has failed to recognize God and teaches a philosophy contrary to God's truth.

THE DANGERS OF LEAVEN

While on earth, the Lord Jesus warned that "the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened" (Mt. 13:33). He was warning that the false teachings of man would eventually permeate and corrupt the truth. "In the parable the woman is hiding the leaven in the meal offering. The three measures of meal represent the truth of God concerning His Son. The woman represents the false church - that woman, Jezebel, of whom we read in Revelation 2:20, who calls herself a prophetess, and teaches the servants of God unholy principles which are subversive of the faith" (Harry Ironside). As we look about us today, this subversion has taken place and continues to worsen, as it is almost impossible to recognize the truth of God as it is presented in most church pulpits and religious literature. "For the mystery of lawlessness (that hidden principle of rebellion against absolute authority and truth) is already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7). "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). The action began early in the development and growth of Christianity. As time has

progressed, Christendom has been permeated with false teaching; thus Paul states in his final letter, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3,4).

THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES

The Lord Jesus warned His disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Lk. 12:1). When we think of the leaven of the Pharisees, we think of hypocrisy and ritualism. This is manifested by the outward observance of prescribed religious rites while refusing the inward adherence of the heart to the truth of God. It is spiritual pretense. It is "going through the ritual", but true commitment to the truth is lacking. The Lord Jesus stated the case when He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence" (Mt. 23:25). Many today outwardly go through the rituals of the church, yet deny the very doctrines that they symbolize.

THE LEAVEN OF THE SADDUCEES

Also the Lord Jesus warned His disciples of the leaven of the Sadducees (Mt. 16:6). We are told that the Sadducees were those who denied that there is a resurrection (Mk. 12:18; Lk. 20:27). In Acts we learn that they also did not believe in angels or spirits (Acts 23:8). They denied the supernatural evidences in the Scriptures. "As they yielded more fully to Greek influence, they adopted the principles of the Aristotelian

philosophy, and refused to accept any doctrine which they could not prove by pure reason" (J. D. Davis). They were the rationalists of their day and we have plenty of them among us today. "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Trying to explain everything from a humanistic viewpoint, they attempt to remove the very foundation of the truth as it is taught in the Holy Scriptures. In our colleges and universities, many young students have been deceived by these deceivers. Even so-called "Christian colleges" have professors who ridicule portions of God's Word.

THE LEAVEN OF HEROD

On several occasions, Christ was approached by the Herodians (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 3:6). They evidently were followers of the Herod family which was not fully of Jewish descent. They were often in confrontation with the Pharisees because they tried to please the Roman authorities, but they both joined together in their opposition to Christ. Christ warned the disciples about the leaven of Herod (Mk. 8:15) which could be described as worldliness and political involvement. It is impossible to adhere to the truth of God and at the same time cultivate friendship with the world. "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4). Seeking to please the world, many have diluted the truth of God to make it more palatable to the world. This results in watering down even the basic truths of the Gospel in order not to cause offense. We

can be certain that if we stand for the truth, the world will be offended. Christ said to His disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn. 15:18,19).

THE LEAVEN OF MALICE AND WICKEDNESS

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:7,8). Immoral behavior and the truth of God, as it is taught in the Word of God, cannot exist together. If we tolerate immoral behavior, we are denying the basic teachings of God. The Corinthian church was not only tolerating evil within the church, but they were actually proud of their "tolerance". The leaven of evil had puffed them up. "And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you" (1 Cor. 5:2). The church today has become very lax about enforcing discipline regarding acts of immorality. "The whole point was that it was a case of moral depravity on the part of a member of that church, and that was the whole reason of dealing with it here. Not that Paul was not concerned about that failure on the part of this particular man, but he was far more concerned about the influence of sin upon the church which was not dealing with it" (G. Campbell Morgan). If immoral living is tolerated than it soon spreads

throughout the church. Thus Paul adds, "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6)?

THE LEAVEN OF FLESHLY DOCTRINE

The false teaching that was taking place at Galatia was very appealing to the flesh. The teaching is summarized by Paul when he says, "As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these try to compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh" (Gal. 6:12,13). Most false doctrine is appealing to the flesh. It attempts to take away that part of the Gospel which displeases the fleshly efforts of man. It stresses the ability of the flesh to please God. Thus Paul declared, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6,7). This appeal to the flesh is what makes false doctrine so dangerous. It can spread rapidly because it has this fleshly appeal. Thus Paul warns, "This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Gal. 5:8,9).

BEWARE OF LEAVEN

Let us then be discerning and aware that we are living in the midst of leaven all about us. We have been warned: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know

the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.....We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 Jn. 4:1-3,6). Leaven represents error and it is spreading rapidly.

"Think of some of the great and rapidly increasing cults of evil doctrine in our midst today....Then consider that these rapidly growing organizations are being recruited from the ranks of those who once made a profession of Christianity but are now apostate therefrom. Then, in the various so-called orthodox denominations, see the indifference of many, and the opposition of some to the very cardinal doctrines of Christian truth....Let anyone but look round today and he will see how rapidly things in Christendom are hastening to the consummation" of Matthew 13:33: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal TILL IT WAS ALL UNLEAVENED". (L. Laurenson).

"Therefore, let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13). "...what communion has light with darkness" (2 Cor. 6:14)?

The Mighty Super Weapon

Launched From A Secret Place It Unleashes A Power Beyond Any Invention Of Man In a time of great distress, one of God's servants cried out for God's super-weapon: "Brethren, pray for us." And so they did and now let us look at the results.

1. "They called for the apostles and beat them, and commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go."

Somewhere there in Jerusalem, as the apostles were beaten and then released, a band of Christians prayed that God would release His servants and give them the courage to continue on preaching in the name of Jesus.

"So they (the apostles) departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily...they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." (Acts 5:40-42)

2. "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered...and devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentations over him." A man named Saul "made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison." This same Saul, "still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord", made his way toward Damascus to widen his path of destruction.

Somewhere there in Jerusalem, as this man Saul continued his murderous journey toward Damascus, a

company of trembling saints prayed that God would stop this giant from crushing His people.

"Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven...he fell to the ground,.. trembling and astonished", Saul said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-6)

3. "Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword and because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also.. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover." There in Jerusalem in the house of Mary, the Mother of Mark, many were gathered together to pray. The Passover would soon be over, and they pleaded with God to somehow stop the murderous intent of this wicked king.

"Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up... and his chains fell off his hands.. when they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate... which opened to them of its own accord... and they went out." (Acts 12:1-11)

4. "When her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.. then the multitude rose up together against them... and when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely."

Many that night prayed for Paul and Silas. Perhaps Lydia and some other women met by the riverside there in

Philippi. Perhaps a group of believers back home in Antioch prayed fervently that night.

"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed." (Acts 16:19-26)

5. "Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead."

But there were disciples there in that city where Paul had preached. As they dragged his limp body from the city gates, they prayed from the depths of their heart that this missionary who brought them the Good News might be able to continue on his mission.

"However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned. (Acts 14:19,20)

6. "The Jews from Asia, seeing Paul in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him...and all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; immediately the doors were shut."

The brethren in Jerusalem prayed for Paul and probably even those elders from Ephesus, who wept and hugged Paul as he left them, were praying fervently for him. They knew the danger and they prayed the harder.

"Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul." (Acts 21:27-32)

In times of great distress, God's servants still cry out for God's super-weapon: "Brethren, pray for us." If we have not begun, we must begin now. If we have begun, we must never stop. If we pray some for them, we must pray more for them... "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." (Eph.6:18)

The Old and The New

The ways of man are often a mystery. There are times when we are quick to abandon the old "traditions" for something new. Yet there are other times when we are very reluctant to give up the old for something new. Often the decision is influenced by those around us. If keeping the old makes us seem odd or different, we are ready to adapt the new. If on the other hand, a new challenge in life confronts us, we are slow to respond because it would change our lifestyle and people would begin to ask questions.

About fifty years ago, there was a man named Tim who faced this latter problem. The world has changed in many ways in fifty years, but in other ways it remains exactly the same. Technology changes many circumstances, but the ways of man never change. Tim was invited to attend some evangelistic meetings by a fellow worker at his place of employment. He came out and was intrigued with the messages. On the last evening, he made a profession of faith in Christ as His Savior. He was visited by believers on a number of occasions after he confessed Christ. It soon became apparent to him that he faced two very difficult decisions.

The first one involved his church attendance. He was born and raised in a church that did not preach the Gospel. He had been attending services faithfully every Sunday since he was a young boy. As he grew in his knowledge of the Gospel, he realized the incompatibility of law and grace. The grace of the Gospel did not mix with the cold formality of his church. Christianity, as

taught in the Scriptures, did not go with the revamped religious acts of Judaism performed in the church. But Tim continued to attend services in the morning and then he would go to the Gospel hall in the evening. He found it hard to give up the old. The old was better because it was familiar and it appealed to the flesh. There is a natural reluctance to abandon the old for the new. "But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, The old is better" (Lk. 5:38,39).

The second decision was more in the social world than in the religious. Every Tuesday night for years he went to a club house to enjoy the evening with longtime friends. His supervisor at work was one of them and his next door neighbor was another. He soon became the object of much criticism because he would no longer drink any alcoholic beverages with them. He found things to talk about, but he often cringed at many of the off-color stories that he would hear each week. His friends knew there was a change but he never felt he had the right opportunity to tell them what had happened to him. "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles - when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you" (1 Pet. 4:3,4).

It took him two years, but he finally made the inevitable decision. He stopped going to the church and he stayed home on Tuesday evenings. He literally trembled when he made the decisions. It was tough, but he knew it had

to be done. Years later, he had only one regret. He wished that he had done it much sooner. How about you, reader? Are you still holding on to some old ways? Let go of them and your life will begin to blossom for God.

The Silences of the Bible

Although the Bible sometimes explains some events in great detail, most of the time it explains events with an amazing small number of words, compared to the volumes that human authors have written in portraying human history. There are some events in the Bible that human authors would have explained in minute detail; yet the Bible has remained silent. The silence is most significant. God has clearly indicated in the contents of the Bible that there is "a time to keep silence and a time to speak" (Eccl. 3:7). Let us look at some of these examples of the profound silence of the Scriptures.

The Origin Of Cain's Wife. And Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch (Gen. 4:17). Without any explanation or identification by name or origin, the Bible informs us that Cain had a wife that bore him a son. Down through the ages this has become a source of ridicule by scoffers and unbelievers of the Bible. If Cain were the oldest son of the first man, Adam, where would he find a wife? The Bible simply but majestically states that Eve became the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20) and that Adam begot sons and daughters (Gen. 5:4). We would assume that Cain married one of his sisters, but God never tells us. We learn very early in the Bible that God never attempts to explain that which seems irrational to the unbelieving heart. Faith has no problem resting with the fact that God was able to provide Cain with a wife. What further explanation is needed?

The Origin Of Races.

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech
And the Lord said, Come, let Us go down and there

confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth (Gen. 11:1,7,9). In very simple and majestic language the Bible explains the origin of languages and the scattering of them over the face of the earth. But never does the Bible mention, from beginning to end, the origin or even the existence of races on the earth. Racial barriers and racial strife are the product of fallen man. God has never recognized it. In God's sight all have sinned and all need to be saved from their sin. None is better than the other and nowhere in the Bible can man find any support for racial superiority of one race over another. Thus we learn from this silence that God never contributes to the artificial and hypocritical views of man in regard to his ancestry or genealogy.

The Worldly Training Of Moses.

And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son Now it came to pass in those days when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren (Ex. 2:10,11). By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God.... (Heb. 11:24,25). But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. But when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel (Acts 7:21-23). Now what is significant about the above verses is the abrupt manner in which God deals with the first forty years of the life of Moses. In a few words, forty years of this man's life is passed over. He evidently

received a thorough training in Egyptian culture, science, technology, and particularly in the language arts and literature. Yet God uses Stephen to give us just a brief note that Moses received this training. There are no details, no lengthy listing of his educational achievements. We would have listed his degrees and made much over his academic achievements. We would have boasted of his oratorical skills and his leadership abilities. Yet it is in these areas that Moses proved to be weak when he came to serve God in the mighty deliverance of His people from Egypt. God was silent about his formal education because it was insignificant when Moses had to face the moral issues of the slavery of God's people under the tyrannical rule of Pharaoh. The educational background of a man takes a back seat to the spiritual development of a man.

The Private Life Of Christ At Nazareth.

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23). So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him (Lk. 2:39,40). When He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Lk. 2:42,51,52). Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.... (Lk. 3:23). Only one incident in the childhood of Christ is recorded in the Scriptures

as found in the second chapter of Luke when He was twelve years old. For the next eighteen years God is absolutely silent. Yet we receive four accounts from each Gospel of the three years of His public ministry, His death, and His resurrection. Man has tried to insert all kinds of imaginary tales about the early years of Christ prior to His public ministry. "If you want signs and wonders the Apocryphal Books will give you all kinds of things attributed to Him. Uninspired writers have tried to fill the gap by producing imaginary stories of the childhood, and youth, and manhood of Jesus. There are weird myths and we may be sure none of these things is true. Our Lord Jesus lived a normal life as a boy, growing up in a beautiful Jewish home where the Word of God was adored and loved. We would like to know more of those hidden years at Nazareth. We just have enough to let us know that He was a subject Child, and that His heart was always open to the voice of God, His Father." (H. Ironside)

"With the settlement at Nazareth, our information comes to a sudden stop, and over the rest of the life of Jesus, till His public ministry begins, a thick covering is drawn, which is only lifted once. We should have wished the narrative to continue with the same fulness through the years of His boyhood and youth. In modern biographies there are few parts more interesting than the anecdotes which they furnish of the childhood of their subjects, but it has pleased God, Whose silence is no less wonderful than His words, to keep it shut. It was natural that, where God was silent and curiosity was strong, the fancy of man should attempt to fill up the blank. They make Him a worker of frivolous and useless marvels.

They are compilations of worthless and often blasphemous fables." (J. Stalker)

The Lord Jesus did not come into this world to save us by His life. The purpose of His first advent was to give His life, to die. Because of this the years of His life are passed over quickly and only the immediate years leading up to His death are given to us in detail. As the time drew near for His death, He said, "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour (Jn. 12:27)." When God writes, He address the issues that are essential for the carrying out of His eternal purposes. He does not concern Himself with frivolous details that are pleasing to the dramatic inventions of man.

The Three Hours Of Darkness On The Cross.

Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is translated, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? (Mark 15:33,34).

Those three hours of darkness on the cross were the most mysterious of all God's silences. Who can possibly understand what took place during those hours? "At twelve o'clock the storm of human scoffing ceases; the cloudless sun suddenly, and from no natural causes, shines not; thick darkness envelopes the scene; and absolute silence takes the place of the noisy babble. What is taking place? Oh, surely, another storm is sweeping with its waves and billows over that holy Head; for at length after three hours, the silence is broken, and a cry pierces the darkness, till it strikes a

heaven not opened now, but closed even to Him." (F.C. Jennings) How could God possibly describe those three hours to a sinful race that neither understands the horror of being forsaken of God nor can possibly feel the intense waves of judgment that God pronounced upon His Son? To those who know that during those silent hours He bore the judgment due to us, our hearts are filled with deep gratitude and we are satisfied to know that we could never understand the enormity or even the manner of His suffering.

In the Holy Scriptures God has told us all that we need to know. There are things we shall never know nor would we be capable of ever knowing, at least until we reach the shores of eternity with God.

They Met the Lord Jesus Christ, They Were Never the Same

There are people today who say they met the Lord Jesus. Yet they continue to live the same way and to be the same person that they were before they met Him.

Impossible! We can never be the same if we have truly met the Lord Jesus by faith. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, ALL THINGS HAVE BECOME NEW" (2 Cor. 5:17). "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18)

1. There was a Samaritan woman who met Jesus at a well where she came to draw water. They conversed together. As she talked with Him, her old ways and ideas were brought to light and they crumbled before Him. She left her waterpot which represented her original mission and went away with a new mission. "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him BECAUSE OF THE WORD OF THE WOMAN who testified, He told me all that I ever did." (Jn. 4:39) Jesus put a message on that lady's lips that was never there before.

2. There was a man born blind who met Jesus on what he thought would be just another day of his dark and boring existence. He was told to go to the pool of Siloam and wash off the clay that Jesus had put on his eyes. He went and washed and received his sight. The religious leaders about him sought to refute his testimony of what Jesus did and tried to convince him that the Man who did this miracle was a sinner. The more this man thought

about what Jesus did and who He was, the more convinced he was of His greatness. Because he refused to change his opinion of Christ, he was cast out of the synagogue. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, Do you believe in the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is He Lord, that I may believe in Him? And Jesus said to him, You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you. Then he said, Lord, I believe! And He worshiped Him" (Jn. 9:35-38). This man not only walked away with physical sight which he never had from birth, but he also walked away with spiritual sight which he never had from birth.

3. There was a woman named Mary Magdalene who met Jesus by the tomb where they had buried Him. She had met Him before because He had cast seven demons out of her. (Mk. 16:9) She thought they had buried Him and she would never see Him again. She stood outside by the tomb weeping. When she turned around Jesus was standing there, but she did not know that it was Him. Then He spoke her name. "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." (Jn. 10:3,4) She knew His voice and would have fallen at His feet, but Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." (Jn. 20:17) Mary Magdalene ran to the disciples with a message that she never would have believed possible. The Lord Jesus Christ was alive, who

once was dead, and He lives to die no more. "You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart."

4. There was a man named Zacchaeus who had heard much about Jesus, and there was a great crowd gathered to see him. Zacchaeus had no physical ailments but he felt a great need to meet Jesus. He climbed up a tree to see Him, but before he knew it Jesus was there calling him by name to come down. How did Jesus know He was up there and how did He know his name? He made haste and came down and received Jesus joyfully. He listened to the words of Jesus. Dying of spiritual thirst, he drank in every word that was spoken. "Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." (Lk. 19:8) This proclamation did not save Him. This proclamation gave the evidence that he was already gloriously saved and a great change had taken place. This rich tax collector who had cheated many people in order to become rich, was now willing to give it away. This man who many people dreaded to see because they knew he would take away their money, was now giving back money to the people from whom he had taken it. He met Jesus and his outlook on life would never be the same. He had new goals and new ambitions.

And so the testimony goes on and on! Through the Gospels and into the Acts. Through the centuries and on to this present time. How amazing is the transformation, how thrilling is the story of those who have been changed! There may be many pretenders, but the testimony of those who have really met Jesus can never be silenced. It's real; it's real! If you have been a

pretender, fall at His feet, and ask Him to change you.
You'll never be the same.

Wanted: Dependable Workers

As they began a new job that would take one year to complete, the foreman of the construction crew said to them: "Men, we are starting with fifty workers. Only twenty of you will stay long enough to complete the job. Of those twenty who finish, only ten will really do their job well. These are the statistics I deal with on every job. Under which category do you fit? (1) You start the job, but never finish (2) You stay to the end, but you tend to get sloppy as time goes by (3) You finish the job well."

In the assemblies today, there is a desperate need for young men and women who are willing to dedicate themselves to the local work of the assembly. There is a need, not only to start to serve, but to stay with it until it is finished and to be responsible to do it well. If you ever worked at constructing or putting together anything, whether in the workshop or in the kitchen, there are some important guidelines that are followed to make it a job well done.

1. ATTENDANCE. I cannot do any job if I am not there. Sometimes the hardest part of a job is just to get there on time. Some never really get to be helpers in the local assembly because they are missing so often that they do not even know what the needs are. Paul said of Demas, "He has forsaken me, having loved this present world..." (2 Tim 4:10). Demas would have explained it differently. He would have given many good reasons as to why he was not there when he was needed. But the truth is, he had other interests in this world that came before the work of the Lord and he was not there when he was needed.

2. **ATTITUDE.** A bad attitude makes any job difficult and usually results in doing the job carelessly, showing disregard and irresponsibility toward its completion.

"For God is not unrighteous to forget or overlook your labor and the love which you have shown for His name's sake in ministering to the needs of the saints" (Heb. 6:10). When love is the motivating factor in any service in the assembly, it brings about an attitude that is pleasing to God and an atmosphere that unites the children of God. Many cease in their service in the assembly because they are not appreciated, thanked, or complimented. If we are looking to God for reward, and not to man, this attitude will prevail even under criticism.

3. **INGREDIENTS.** The materials that are used make a big difference when the job is finished. The best cook cannot get good results if the ingredients are faulty. The work of a bricklayer will not last long if the bricks are crumbling. Our service needs to be conformed to the patterns and truth presented in the Holy Scriptures. The saints in the early church steadfastly persevered because they devoted themselves constantly "to the instruction of the apostles" (Acts 2:42). We no longer have apostles to instruct us, but we have their inspired instructions preserved for us in the Word of God. We serve best when we are submitting ourselves daily to the instructions of God's Word.

4. **WORKMANSHIP.** The experience of the workman is reflected in the results of the work. It is necessary to be an apprentice before becoming a journeyman or skilled worker. Practice and instruction ought always to precede the final performance of a task. Through the years, God disciplines and trains his servants through

experience. These experienced workers should be teaching the younger workers. For a job to be done well, it needs to be done in the right way. "And the instructions which you have heard from me, along with many witnesses, transmit and entrust as a deposit to reliable and faithful men who will be competent and qualified to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). When seeking to serve the assembly, it is important to seek the advice of older and experienced servants of God.

5. TIME. Every well done job takes time. Whenever we are in a hurry, the job suffers in some way. If the job is important then it deserves to be appropriated the proper time to complete it satisfactorily. Too often the labors in an assembly receive a low priority in our schedule; consequently, they are done hurriedly and carelessly. In fact, they are often done at the very last minute. Any service worth doing requires patience and longsuffering. The very word "patience" denotes a period of time. If our schedule is overcrowded with things other than the assembly, we obviously cannot be good servants of the assembly. "See how the farmer waits expectantly for the precious harvest from the land...So you also must be patient" (Jam. 5:7,8)

What is Truth?

Apparently in the days of ancient Rome, truth was determined by the philosophy of relativism. This was based on the theory that all truth is relative to the individual and to the time or place in which he acts. Evidently Pilate was greatly influenced by this philosophy and when the Lord Jesus spoke to him about truth during His “mock trial,” Pilate asked the question, “What is truth?” (Jn. 18:37,38) He assumed that truth to the Roman was very different than truth to the Jew. He probably thought that what was considered truth in his day was very different than what they considered truth in the previous century. The Bible, which is the Word of God, makes it clear that truth is absolute. It is not based on an individual’s interpretation at a certain time, place, or circumstance. It is completed and never subject to change by any individual or event, and most importantly, it can be understood and believed. Our day is no different than Pilate’s day. People think it is “tolerant” to “respect” all beliefs. They infer that truth is whatever one chooses to believe and the source or authority is not to be questioned.

The Holy Spirit especially exercised and used one of the Lord’s apostles regarding the revelation of truth. His name was John and in the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John he refers to truth in at least thirty-seven verses. Let us examine some of these verses and find the answer to Pilate’s question, What is truth?

The Source Of All Truth

Whatever God has spoken is the truth. He is the absolute source of truth. It does not come from man or

from any source in this world. In addressing the Father, the Lord Jesus said to Him, "Your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). That statement is as absolute as "God is love" or "God is light." Because He is light, He must reveal the truth. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2), and everything He has said is the truth. Thus we can know the absolute truth by consulting the Bible, the written Word of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Because the Lord Jesus Christ is God, He is also the source of truth and He brought truth into the world when He came into the world. "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17) and His character is described as being full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14). Whenever He spoke, He spoke the truth. He said to the Jews when here on earth, "But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God" (Jn. 8:40). When addressing the disciples before His death, He stated, "I tell you the truth" (Jn. 16:7). Christ is actually the personification of truth; thus He could say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6).

The third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, is called "the Spirit of truth" (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 1 Jn. 5:6). Through the Spirit, God revealed the truth to man. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). As He functions in the life of those who commit themselves to Christ, He guides them into all truth (16:13). In and of ourselves, we would not be capable of knowing the truth, but through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are able to understand the truth.

On the other hand, the Bible identifies the devil, Satan, as the source of error and falsehood. Christ said to those

who refused to believe the truth, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (Jn. 8:44).

The Subjects Of The Truth

Those who receive God’s truth and become subjects of His truth, take on certain characteristics that can only be true of those who walk in the truth. “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen” (Jn. 3:21). “Truth seeks no corners. Those who mean and act honestly dread not a scrutiny, but desire it rather.” (Matthew Henry). One of the first characteristics of knowing the truth is the willingness to acknowledge the truth about ourselves. God tells us we are sinners, and we do not seek to hide this fact, but we bring it out into the light and acknowledge the truth of it. By nature, we do not want the truth because it reveals our sinful condition. Christ told those who refused the truth, “But because I tell you the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?” (Jn. 8:45,46) The truth exposes us and we acknowledge before God our sinful condition. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:6,8).

Once we accept the truth, we become set apart for God. “Sanctify them by Your truth” And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the

truth”(Jn. 17:17,19). “As the believer walks in the truth, the truth made known by the Father through the Son, he is increasingly sanctified and enabled to walk even as He walked” (A. C. Gaebelien). The effect of truth on our walk and character is emphasized by John in his epistles. “He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him” (1 Jn. 2:4;3:18,19). “For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 Jn. 3,4). When truth is received, it has a dynamic result in the walk of the believer. Truth is more than head knowledge; its reception results in great changes in the life of the believer.

The Success Of Truth

As we look around this world, it would appear that wrong and falsehood are on the throne. It would appear that truth is mocked and the cost of denying it seems small. Not so. Those who practice deceit and error will eventually be exposed and in the end only those who receive the truth of God will triumph. “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32,34). Freedom of the spirit can only be realized by those who receive the truth. Those who base their choices upon lies become victims and slaves of their very choices.

Those who walk in the truth have the God-given ability to recognize error. “We are of God. He who knows God

hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 Jn. 4:6). Through familiarity with the truth, which is the Word of God, the believer develops the ability to recognize what is not of the truth. The more truth we know, the less likely it is that we will be carried away by error, so "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ" (Eph. 4:14, 15).

In the ages to come, the lies of men will be brought to light, and only the truth, which comes from God, will remain steadfast forever. John speaks of the truth which abides in us as that which "will be with us forever" (2 Jn. 2). We will eventually lose all our earthly possessions that we have gathered here, but the truth will remain with us forever. Let us go in then for gathering the truth. Let us learn it, memorize it, and receive it willingly. Let the skeptics laugh, the tolerant growl, and the philosopher mock, but God's truth is absolute and we can absolutely believe it with all our heart.

Where is the Enemy?

In the early days of the church it was not difficult to recognize where the enemy was. He was all around them, but he was outside the church. The religious authorities of Judaism did not pretend to be Christians. In fact, they considered Christianity to be their enemy and they sought to stamp it out. Saul of Tarsus, a sworn enemy of the Christians, was described as one who was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). When Ananias was asked to put hands on Saul so that his sight might be restored, he responded, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem" (Acts 9:13). The church knew and recognized its enemy.

In our present world we often walk about not knowing where the enemy is. He is within the church and pretends to be one of us. We were warned that this would happen in some of the later books of the New Testament. "There will be false teachers among yourselves, who will subtly and stealthily introduce heretical doctrines...(2 Pet. 2:1). Jude also testified, "For certain men have crept in stealthily (gaining entrance secretly by a side door)" (Jude 4). We were warned this would happen and it certainly has occurred. The greatest enemies of the Christian church today are within the church. This leads to three interesting questions: (1) How did they get there? (2) How do we recognize them? (3) How do we combat them?

1. HOW DID THEY GET THERE? Satan put them there because he knew it would be an effective way to disturb

the growth of the church. Since he did not succeed with outward persecution, he would attempt to succeed through inward perversion of the truth. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers transform themselves into ministers of righteousness...." (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Because the Christian church suffers so little persecution today, it is profitable and even attractive for pretenders to advance themselves into positions of authority. For some it is an appealing way to make profits. They "have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit...." (Jude 11). For others it is an attractive way to gain popularity. "They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them" (1 Jn. 4:5).

2. HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE THEM? Generally the false teacher will try to use words that sound acceptable to the believer. They have learned the "evangelical terminology". It is necessary to find out what they truly believe about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the real test. They cannot be right in any other doctrine if they are wrong in their thinking about Christ. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God (he acknowledges and confesses that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, actually has become man), and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God..." (1 Jn. 4:1-3).

3. HOW DO WE COMBAT THEM? There are actions that especially need to be taken by the shepherds or overseers of the flock because they are given a special charge through Paul to protect the flock from error.

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore WATCH....." (Acts 20:28-31). This watchfulness is exercised in three distinct ways.

(1) BY AN ATTITUDE OF AWARENESS. False teachers are deceitful just as Satan is deceitful. We cannot have the attitude, "It will never happen here". It can and it will. We must be alert and catch it at the beginning. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles (the tricks or deceits) of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). The good soldier is prepared for combat at the beginning of the conflict. He does not wait for the enemy to gain an advantage.

(2) BY USING THE WORD OF GOD AS THE OFFENSIVE WEAPON AGAINST THE FOE. Any other weapon will be ineffective. The Word of God is able to effectively fight false doctrine. "And take....the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). "He Himself gave.....pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning

craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ" (Eph. 4:11-15).

(3) BY REMOVING THOSE WHO INSIST ON TEACHING FALSELY EVEN AFTER BEING CORRECTED. "I appeal to you, brethren, to be on your guard concerning those who create dissensions and difficulties and cause divisions, in opposition to the doctrine (the teaching) which you have been taught. I warn you to turn aside from them, to avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17,18). Any tolerance of this sort of person allows the cancer to grow or the leaven to spread.